

# TAKING MORAL INDETERMINACY SERIOUSLY: IN DEFENCE OF COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN MORAL REALISM AND INDETERMINACY

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# Taking Moral Indeterminacy Seriously: In Defence of Compatibility between Moral Realism and Indeterminacy

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy (MPhil)  
at the University of St Andrews

March 2019



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*Jiwon Kim*

## **Abstract**

Moral indeterminacy appears to be incompatible with moral realism at first glance because moral realists believe that there are objective moral facts in the world, which seem determinate. Given the commitment to objective moral facts, moral realists would want to argue that there can be a considerable amount of convergence on moral matters. However, moral disagreement is too prevalent for realists to be optimistic that there will be convergence sometime in the future. Some moral disagreements seem to remain irresolvable or even faultless. Since it is reasonable to think that moral disagreements arise because there is indeterminacy, moral realists would want to explain indeterminacy without any inconsistency or incompatibility.

I argue that moral realism is compatible with every kind of indeterminacy: metaphysical indeterminacy, semantic indeterminacy, and epistemic indeterminacy. What I contribute to indeterminacy and moral realism debate is that, in contrast with how some philosophers argue that all moral indeterminacy can be reduced to metaphysical indeterminacy or epistemicism, I argue that every kind of indeterminacy has its own place. I show that each kind of indeterminacy is helpful for moral realists to explain different types of moral disagreement: faultless moral disagreement can be explained through semantic indeterminacy; irresolvable moral disagreement can be explained through metaphysical indeterminacy; resolvable disagreement can be explained through epistemicism.

The upshot of my research is that moral realists can still uphold their tenets on moral objectivity and truth while embracing indeterminacy, the cause of disagreement, at the same time. If the strength of a metaethical theory is measured by how much explanation it can provide, my dissertation shows that moral realism wins over anti-realism in this regard.

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## 1. Introduction

Walking on a street, let's say that you come across a £5 note. You ask yourself if it is permissible to take a five-pound note. Maybe you reason that, since it is permissible to pick up a lucky penny, then it must be permissible to pick up two lucky pennies. After all, what's just one more penny? You keep adding one penny to the previous amount until you reach the conclusion that it is permissible to take the five-pound note. However, you could use a similar reasoning process to argue against your own conclusion. You know that if you stumble upon a duffle bag full of cash, that it is impermissible to take it. You might reason that you cannot take any of it. Not even one penny. But what about two pennies? Definitely not two pennies. That is worse than taking just one. You reason like this until you conclude that it is impermissible to take £5 from the duffle bag. This leaves you in a curious position. You originally reasoned that it is permissible to take £5 that you find on the street. Now you have reasoned that it is impermissible. Which is it? Perhaps it is indeterminate as to whether or not it is permissible or impermissible to take the £5 on the ground.

Such a situation seems like an instance of indeterminacy: it is indeterminate whether it is permissible to pick up a specific amount of pounds. This is also an instance of moral indeterminacy because we are curious to know whether it is morally permissible to take some pounds on the ground without causing harm to anyone. Morally indeterminate situations like this are prevalent in our lives. It is permissible to drink a glass of wine from a shared bottle, and it is not permissible to drink the whole bottle on your own. Then drinking how many glasses of wine is borderline permissible? It is permissible to get an abortion on the first day of pregnancy, and it is not permissible to get an abortion on the 9<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy. Then on what day does it become not permissible to get an abortion? Moral agents have problems making morally good or right decisions because these kinds of morally indeterminate situations are widespread. What should we do when doing  $\phi$  is neither determinately permissible nor determinately not permissible?

The aim of my thesis is not to provide an answer to the question “what should we do when things are morally indeterminate?” My aim is not to give a normative account of what one ought to do under moral uncertainty. Even though it is an important practical question to be pursued, my thesis instead focuses on the theoretical part of moral indeterminacy. I analyse what exactly moral indeterminacy is in regards with epistemic, semantic, and metaphysical aspects, and provide a version of moral realism that is compatible with such indeterminacy because, in metaethics, not everyone thinks that moral realism is compatible with indeterminacy. To state my aim in a clearer way, my goal is not to dissolve indeterminacy. Rather, I want to suggest a way for moral realists to endorse indeterminacy in such a way that indeterminacy is compatible with realism. If moral realists can successfully explain moral indeterminacy, which appears to be incompatible with moral realism at first glance, indeterminacy will become useful for moral realists to explain the prevalence of moral disagreement, such as faultless disagreement and irresolvable disagreement, of which anti-realists have been actively taken to defend their position.

## **1.1 Motivation: Indeterminacy and Metaethics**

Before delving into those issues, it must be made clear what role moral indeterminacy plays in metaethics. I'll explain three roles that indeterminacy plays in metaethics in order to highlight some of the problems that I shall be addressing in this dissertation.

First, indeterminacy is a problem to the existing views in metaethics, especially to moral realism. It is because indeterminacy seems incompatible with moral realism at first glance.<sup>1</sup> It seems incompatible because, in moral realism, it is commonly accepted that there are objective moral facts and properties, and objective facts appear to be determinate. For example, Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) argue that there are moral fixed points which are determinate, substantive, and non-vacuous

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, moral indeterminacy could be also problematic for anti-realism. See Baima (2014).

moral conceptual truths such as, “It is *pro tanto* wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.” According to David Enoch (2011), there are normative truths that are perfectly objective, universal, and absolute, just as respectable as empirical or mathematical truths. These truths are such that “we should care about our future well-being, that we should not humiliate other people, that we should not reason and form beliefs in ways we know to be unreliable” (1).

Moral realists, such as Shafer-Landau and Enoch, want to hold that moral facts are ontologically on a par with non-moral facts, such as scientific or mathematical facts. Given that it is not empirically indeterminate whether, e.g., the tree is seven feet tall, it is not morally indeterminate whether picking up a five-pound note is morally permissible. According to moral realism, regardless of whether one holds robust moral realism (non-naturalism) or Cornell realism (naturalism)<sup>2</sup>, there is fact of the matter in moral reality.

Given their commitment to objective moral facts, moral realists would want to argue that there can be a considerable amount of convergence on moral matters. We disagree because moral facts are not discovered enough to settle disagreement. Once more moral facts are discovered, there will be convergence on moral matters. This runs parallel with how mathematical and scientific facts converge as more mathematical and scientific facts are discovered.<sup>3</sup>

However, moral disagreement is too prevalent for realists to be naively optimistic that there will be convergence sometime in the future. Some moral disagreements seem to remain irresolvable or even faultless. Acknowledging that moral disagreement can sometimes be irresolvable, Shafer-Landau (1994) takes indeterminacy as the key to explaining irresolvable and intractable moral disagreement.<sup>4</sup> Even though indeterminacy appears to be incompatible with moral

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<sup>2</sup> There can be other positions of moral realism, such as moral intuitionism and constructivism, which are evidence-dependent. I bracket these positions in my thesis because I want to focus on the mind-independent accounts of moral realism.

<sup>3</sup> Enoch acknowledges that such a convergence would look like a miracle, but he explains it with the notion of pre-established harmony. See Enoch (2011: 168-176).

<sup>4</sup> This position is completely opposite from what Enoch (2009) holds. I talk more about this point in chapter 5.



realism, moral realists might be able to find indeterminacy useful to explain moral disagreement.

Therefore, the second role that indeterminacy plays in metaethics is that it has the potential to become a tool for moral realists to explain disagreement. For example, David Brink (1989: 202) thinks that moral ties are possible. Different moral considerations, which are equally and objectively valuable, can be incommensurable. It is possible that both parties in disagreement are not systemically mistaken: their dispute might have no unique resolution. If moral realists can bring in indeterminacy into this debate and say that moral ties originate from metaphysical indeterminacy, Brink's explanation might become more powerful. David Wiggins (1990: 77) also acknowledges that, in the face of genuine disagreement, there could be no standpoint from which alternative choices could ever be practically deliberated. Likewise, if moral realists can say that genuine moral disagreement arises from indeterminacy in the world, then Wiggins's explanation will be able to gain more weight.

The third role that indeterminacy plays in metaethics is providing an argument to explain moral disagreement, especially for anti-realists. It is easier for anti-realists than realists to appeal to indeterminacy to explain moral disagreement because anti-realists can easily say that moral indeterminacy is simply the differences in our opinions which cannot reach convergence. For anti-realists, moral disagreement is prevalent due to our differences in social norms, subjective values, and attitudes. Such an argument is used by Mackie (1977: 36) to undermine moral objectivity: moral disagreement is intractable because there is an enormous amount of variation in our moral judgments.

In response, moral realists commonly appeal to moral luck or moral intuition which, somehow, makes some of us epistemically privileged to determinate and objective moral knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Moral disagreement is nothing but the conflict between those who have such privileged epistemic access to objective moral knowledge and

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Robert Audi, Jonathan Dancy, David Enoch, Michael Huemer, David McNaughton, and Russ Shafer-Landau are happy to be called moral intuitionists.

those who do not. Therefore, it is always the case that one party, the one who does not have access to objective moral knowledge, is at fault.

Nonetheless, some objective moral knowledge must be unknowable to us due to our cognitive limitations. Then moral realism can easily lead to scepticism because we do not know how much of this is knowledge unknowable. Due to the prevalence of moral disagreement which originates from our cognitive limitations, it could turn out to be that moral knowledge is impossible.<sup>6</sup> No moral realists would want to draw such a conclusion.

## **1.2 The Goal of Dissertation**

If it can be shown that moral realism can appeal to indeterminacy without any inconsistency or incompatibility to explain prevalent moral disagreement better than anti-realists do, indeterminacy will no longer be a problem to moral realism. Indeterminacy will be, in fact, a useful tool for moral realist to explain prevalent and irresolvable moral disagreement. If moral realists can show that indeterminacy cannot be dispensed easily because it is a necessary part of the objective moral reality, the anti-realists' argument from moral disagreement against moral realism will lose its force.

My project is worth pursuing because indeterminacy is prevalent and indispensable in moral reality. Moral realists would want to be able to explain moral disagreement by appealing to indeterminacy. Not only does Shafer-Landau (1994: 336) make a similar point: "If we allow for moral indeterminacy..., then we have a promising explanation of disagreement for the objectivist.", Parfit (2011: 562) also agrees: "If some normative questions are indeterminate, having no answer, this would provide another explanation of some normative disagreements." Therefore,

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<sup>6</sup> Graham Oddie(2005) says, "Robust moral realists hold that there are moral facts and that these facts play no sort of causal explanatory role. [...] It follows that we have strong reason to believe that, were robust moral realism true, our moral beliefs would fail to display epistemic merits. Moral knowledge, were robust realism true, would be impossible."

there are good reasons for moral realists to appeal to indeterminacy to explain moral disagreement. Then the first step for moral realists is to provide a version of moral realism that is compatible with indeterminacy.

This is what I argue for in my dissertation. I argue that moral realism is compatible with every kind of indeterminacy: metaphysical indeterminacy, semantic indeterminacy, and epistemic indeterminacy.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, indeterminacy is no longer a problem for moral realism.<sup>8</sup> Rather, indeterminacy becomes a useful tool for moral realists to explain disagreement. What I aim to contribute to indeterminacy and moral realism debate is that, in contrast with how some philosophers argue that moral indeterminacy is just ontic indeterminacy (Schoenfield 2015) or indeterminacy is just all epistemic (Williamson 1994), I argue that every kind of indeterminacy has its own place. The fact that there are three kinds of indeterminacy will be helpful for moral realists to explain moral disagreement, namely faultless disagreement, irresolvable disagreement, and resolvable disagreement.

The upshot of my research is that while moral realists can explain moral disagreement through metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic indeterminacy, moral anti-realists cannot, unfortunately, make the same move. It seems like a bad result for anti-realists because anti-realists' explanation of indeterminacy only appeals to the differences in our culture or opinions. In contrast, realists' explanation of indeterminacy appeals to a much broader range: semantic indeterminacy originating from our language, metaphysical indeterminacy originating from our world, and epistemic indeterminacy originating from us. If the strength of a theory is measured by how much explanation it can provide, moral realism wins over anti-realism. It is because moral realism has more explanatory power regarding indeterminacy and moral disagreement.

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<sup>7</sup> I am not sure if these three the only kinds, but it would be sufficient to show that it is compatible with these three. I assume that they are not exhaustive whereas Schoenfield (2015) assumes that they are exhaustive with one another.

<sup>8</sup> For example, arguing that indeterminacy is incompatible with moral realism, Constantinescu (2014) concludes that moral realism is false.



In §2, I characterize what moral realism is and why indeterminacy matters in moral realism. In §3, I distinguish three different types – metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic – of indeterminacy and show how each type affects metaethics. In §4, I show how moral realism can be compatible with each type of indeterminacy. In §5, I explain how moral realists can appeal to each type of indeterminacy to explain moral disagreement and lay out the upshots regarding the realism versus anti-realism debate in metaethics.

## **2. Moral Realism**

Before I can show how indeterminacy and moral realism are compatible with each other, I need to explain first what moral realism is. Even though there are many branches of moral realism, I focus on the minimal tenets of moral realism to which every type of moral realists, such as non-naturalistic robust moral realists like David Enoch (2011) and Russ Shafer-Landau (2003, 2007), and naturalistic moral realists like Sturgeon (1988), Boyd (1988), and Brink (1989), would agree. I call the view that I cash out here Minimal Moral Realism. The reason I focus on minimal moral realism is that these tenets are the common principles that all moral realists share. In other words, these tenets are the necessary conditions for moral realism. These tenets are formulated as neutral as possible so that we are talking about the same moral realism from the outset. If indeterminacy is compatible with these tenets, then there's nothing about moral realism as such that's incompatible with indeterminacy. If realists want to appeal to indeterminacy to explain disagreement, then moral realists need to make sure that their version of moral realism does not accept additional tenets that make it incompatible with indeterminacy.

Cashing out this minimal moral realism, three related dimensions of moral realism are to be distinguished: metaphysics, semantics, and epistemology of moral realism. Distinguishing these aspects is important for two reasons. First, it helps us pinpoint which tenets are essential in characterizing moral realism. Second, it helps

us make connections to metaphysical, epistemic, and semantic indeterminacy. In this chapter, I accomplish three things. First, in §2.1, I present the standard way of characterizing minimal moral realism. I point out a problem in characterizing moral realism in the current literature. Therefore, in §2.2, I argue that classical logic is the default position that realists should retain. In §2.3, I modify the way of characterizing minimal moral realism by motivating the problem of creeping minimalism. I argue that realists should accept a relatively robust account of truth in order to have a distinct realist theory that is distinguishable from anti-realism.

## **2.1 The Minimal Moral Realism**

In this section, I list the key tenets of moral realism by distinguishing the tenets that concern the metaphysics of morality from the tenets that concern the semantics and epistemology of morality. It is very common to describe the tenets of moral realism without distinguishing different philosophical implications of these tenets. For example, Sarah McGrath (2010) formulates moral realism to be a conjunction of Cognitivism (paradigmatic moral judgments are truth-apt), Objectivity (which moral judgments are true does not depend on what we accept or believe), and No Error Theory (at least some judgments are true). While Cognitivism and No Error Theory indicate some important features of moral language, Objectivity points towards a more metaphysical aspect of moral truth.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's (1986: 3) characterization is as follows: "Realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and (2) some are literally true." The first claim is about a bivalent feature of moral language, whereas the second is about metaphysics – how the moral reality out there makes the statements literally true.

I sense some problems here. First, the tenets regarding the metaphysics of morality, moral semantics, and moral truths are intermixed without the order of

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<sup>9</sup> If some moral judgements are about moral beliefs or propositions, they could go beyond language.

importance. Since the tenets regarding the metaphysics of morality should be the most important ones for moral realism as it is a metaphysical position, the metaphysical theses should be more emphasized than other tenets. Second, none of the tenets describes how moral reality and the moral language interact with another so that the moral sentences get to be true. They state that moral claims are truth-apt, but it is less clear why moral claims are truth-apt and what kind of truth theories moral realists endorse. Therefore, I want to solve these problems by identifying the tenets with their metaphysical, epistemological, and language aspects and by suggesting a theory of truth to which moral realism should adhere to. Some moral realists might want to be neutral about which theory of truth is correct, but I will show that, in §2.5, moral realists have most reason to accept a truthmaker theory of truth than other theories.

Standardly, moral realism is, as the name indicates, known as defending the view that the matters regarding morality are real. What moral realists mean by ‘real’ is that the moral facts, such as the fact that murder is wrong, exist just as mathematical facts (like the fact that two plus two is four) or scientific facts (such as the acceleration of gravity is  $-9.81 \text{ m/s}^2$ ). Mathematical facts and scientific facts are commonly considered as objective facts. The fact that two plus two equals four does not depend on human minds. Even if every human being believes that two plus two equals five, it does not make the fact that two plus two equals four false. All humans would be mistaken in believing that two plus two equals five. Mathematical facts and scientific facts are *out there* in the world, waiting for our discovery. Likewise, moral facts are out there in the world, too, waiting for our discovery.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the following metaphysical tenet (M):

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<sup>10</sup> Notice that how I characterize moral realism is different from how Cuneo and Shafer-Landau characterizes moral realism. According to them, all moral realists would agree that there are moral truths, but relaxed moral realists, also known as metaphysical quietists, would reject that these truths have any metaphysical implications. They believe that moral realism can be metaphysically light. The main proponents of metaphysical quietism are Nagel (1986), Parfit (2011), and Scanlon (2000), Dworkin, and Kramer. I believe that they are wrong. In my other paper, I argue that quietists can’t remain silent on the metaphysical issues in realism, which ground their whole theory. See Kim (2015).



**(M) OBJECTIVITY: There are moral facts in the world.<sup>11</sup>**

Notice that this characterization of realism has two distinct features of realism as Devitt (1991) and Wright (1993) acknowledge. First is the existence claim, second evidence-independence claim. For example, to be a realist about protons is to hold that protons exist as well as to hold that their existence and nature is independent of humans. Similarly, to be a moral realist is to hold that moral facts exist, and their nature is independent of any evidence we have. Such a claim is endorsed by David Brink (1989). His construal of moral realism consists of two claims: “There are moral facts or truths, and (2) these facts or truths are independent of the evidence for them” (17). In a similar vein, according to David Enoch (2011: 216), a robust moral realist: “asserts that there are perfectly objective, irreducibly normative moral and other normative truths.”<sup>12</sup> Their existence is independent of the cognitive activities of the mind. Devitt acknowledges that the existence of the mind cannot be characterized as existing mind-independently. Therefore, I characterize the objectiveness of moral facts as *evidence-independence* rather than mind-independence.<sup>13</sup> To say that an object has objective existence is, according to Devitt (1991: 15),

not to say that it is unknowable. It is to say that it is not constituted by our knowledge, by our epistemic values, by our capacity to refer to it, by the synthesizing power of the mind, by our imposition of concepts, theories, or languages.

Given that there are moral facts in the world, moral realists need to explain the issues regarding representation and truth. How are these facts represented in our language? A moral realist would say that moral sentences express propositions, and these

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<sup>11</sup> What type of facts are moral facts? If one considers moral facts as non-natural, just like mathematical facts, one is a non-naturalist about morality. This view is known to be a robust form of moral realism. If one considers moral facts as natural, just like scientific facts, one is a naturalist about morality. This view is known as Cornell realism. What makes the *robust* form of moral realism different from Cornell realism, a form of naturalist moral realism, is its endorsement of reducibility of moral facts. While Cornell realists believe that moral facts can be equated with or reducible to natural facts, robust moral realists believe that moral facts cannot be equated with natural facts. Cornell realism, also known as naturalistic non-reductionism, is defended by Sturgeon (1988), Boyd (1988), and Brink (1989). However, since I am concerned with the minimal moral realism, I claim that both non-naturalists and naturalists would agree to (M).

<sup>12</sup> Obviously, moral realists are not claiming that all moral facts are like this. Enoch continues, “If there are some values, then, that are somehow available only locally, in a culture-dependent way, this is not inconsistent with Robust Realism.”

<sup>13</sup> This is to follow McGinn (2002) and Brink (1989).

propositions reflect how the world is. For realists, the truths of a domain become true *in virtue of* an evidence-independent reality. Therefore, moral sentences are truth-evaluable. In other words, moral sentences can be true or false: they are truth-apt. If one thinks that moral sentences are truth-apt, then one endorses cognitivism. Hence, the tenet regarding the semantics (S):

**(S1) COGNITIVISM: Moral sentences are truth-apt.**

According to cognitivism, moral judgments are the beliefs which represent the world as containing normative facts. In other words, “the meaning of a declarative sentence [in Realism] consists in its possibly unrecognisable or verification-transcendent truth condition” (Rasmussen and Ravnkilde 1982: 379). To moral realists, these normative facts are objective moral facts in the world. Therefore, moral sentences which express our beliefs and judgments about the moral facts in the world have a representational direction of fit. When the direction of fit from our judgment to the world matches with one another, the moral judgment is true. If not, false.

**(S2) NO ERROR THEORY: Some moral sentences are true.**

Given (M), moral realism rejects error theory. Error theory is a branch of cognitivism because error theorists also believe that moral sentences are truth-apt. However, according to error theory, none of the moral sentences are true because there are no moral facts in the world. There is nothing that makes moral sentences true. Therefore, all moral sentences, such as “lying is wrong”, are false. According to moral realism, there are objective moral facts in the world. It follows that, at least, some moral sentences are true.

However, these three tenets are not good enough to characterize minimal moral realism. It is easy to say that, in the moral domain, certain entities exist, and some of the propositions of the given domain are true. However, the claims regarding truth are not justified unless we answer these questions: What *kind* of truth does moral realism require? *How* are these sentences true, and what kind of *logical* rules do moral truths obey?

Answering these questions might make minimal moral realism no longer minimal because one might have to dig deeper into theories of truth, semantics, and metaphysics.<sup>14</sup> My motivation to take moral realism another step regarding truth, meaning, and logic is to make clear what exactly moral realism is. Moral realists might want to remain neutral on the theories of truth or not even talk about how metaphysics work. However, since I think that realists should ultimately have something to say about semantics and truth in their complete theory, I argue that there is a need for adding new tenets in supplementing moral realism, regarding truth-theory and classical logic.<sup>15</sup> These new tenets are not necessary for moral realism, but I present my arguments with cost and benefit aspects: it is costly for realists to accept non-classical logic (§2.2) and minimalism about truth (§2.3).<sup>16</sup>

## **2.2 The Default Position: Classical Logic for Moral Realism**

In this section, I argue that, classical logic should be the default position for moral realism to explain indeterminacy. Moral realism should be compatible with classical logic, other things being equal. There's a cost for moral realism if moral realism needs to accept non-classical logic. It is because, once one accepts non-classical logic, one gives up on the reliable method of inference. According to Richard Boyd (1988)'s characterization of moral realism, (a) moral statements are true or false, (b) the truth or falsity of moral statements is independent of our moral opinions or theories, and (c) ordinary canons of moral reasoning constitute a reliable

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<sup>14</sup> For example, discussions on moral semantics have been advanced by Brink (2001), Schroeder (2012), Silk (2013), and Ridge (2014).

<sup>15</sup> There has been standard philosophical debate on realism versus anti-realism involving meaning, truth, and logic as long discussed from Frege, Wittgenstein, McDowell (1976), Putnam (1977), Dummett (1978), Wright (1986) to Williamson (1994). Moral realism is realism applied to the moral domain. Therefore, how to construe moral realism should draw connections to the existing literature on metaphysical realism. Such a debate is advanced by the following literature, for example: Rasmussen and Ravnkilde (1982), Williamson (2007), and Murzi (2010).

<sup>16</sup> This point is also similarly made by Shieh (2018) as a necessary and sufficient condition for realism: "Strict bivalence, on the later view, is necessary but not sufficient for semantic realism. Rather, strict bivalence and classical semantics are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for realism."

method for obtaining and improving moral knowledge. The reliable method for obtaining and improving moral knowledge is to retain classical logic.<sup>17</sup>

First, there are advantages of retaining classical logic if one's a realist. For instance, consider the principle of bivalence. Frege was a strong advocate of the principle of bivalence, one of the main principles of classical logic, which states that "every sentence that has a definite sense, considered, when necessary, as uttered on a particular occasion by a particular speaker, is determinately either true or false" (Dummett 2006: 47). It is because the semantic value of sentences is either true when the predicate functions take the objects to truth, or false when the predicate functions do not take the objects to truth. The principle of bivalence seems to have a strong connection with the objective reality in the world because "*we* do not need to be able to tell whether the predicate is true or false of the object: but *reality* must determine either that it is true of it or that it is false of it" (48). We do not get to decide whether a predicate is applied to an object or not. It does not matter either whether we know or we are able to know that a predicate is applied.

Such a Fregean or Truth-conditional way of thinking about the sentences naturally lead us to accept the principle of bivalence because reality determines whether the truth-conditions obtain or not. If the truth-conditions obtain, the sentence is true. If not, false. As Williamson (1994: 186) points out, "classical semantics and logic are vastly superior to the alternatives in simplicity, power, past success, and integration with theories in other domains." Therefore, it would be a good idea to stick to the truth-conditional semantics and classical logic when moral realists try to explain indeterminacy and vagueness.

Second, there is a cost when one gives up on classical logic. The costs of rejecting the principle of bivalence are as follows. According to Edgington (1980: 155), giving up the principle of bivalence "involves a large sacrifice of inferential practice". Since

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<sup>17</sup> Dummett (1982: 85) makes a separate point that "Realism requires us to hold both that, for statements of the given class, we have a notion of truth under which each statement is determinately either true or false, and also that an understanding of those statements consists in a knowledge of the conditions under which they are true." However, I think that classical logic should be a default position for realism anyway for making reliable inference.

the principle of bivalence states that a statement is true or false, such a principle helps us with a lot of common-sensical inferential practice. For example, imagine that there was a theft at the store. The CCTV showed that there was only one thief breaking into the store. The police caught two suspects, Lisa and Amy. Lisa is a thief, or Lisa is not a thief. If Lisa is not a thief, then Amy is a thief. Such a simple inference process like this does not make sense once we reject the principle of bivalence.

Consider that one accepts intuitionistic logic, so denies a double negation elimination rule which is a theorem of classical logic. Let's assume that one wants to explain what Jean Valjean has done – stealing candlesticks from Bishop Myriel – in *Les Misérables* is wrong but could be excused due to his excruciating circumstance and due to the mercy of Bishop Myriel. She would say something like, “Jean Valjean could be excused for what he has done. However, I am not saying that stealing is not wrong.” She would want to express that stealing is still wrong, but Jean Valjean could be excused from his wrongdoings. However, if she accepts intuitionistic logic, “stealing is wrong” cannot be derived from “I am not saying that stealing is not wrong.” Such an inference is not a reliable source of gaining moral knowledge.

This point will become important as we consider several options to explain indeterminacy in chapter 3. While many philosophers accept non-classical solutions to indeterminacy such as supervaluationism or intuitionism, I will argue that moral realists can explain indeterminacy while remaining fully classical.<sup>18</sup> Applying bivalence to vague moral sentences, moral sentences are still either true or false. When a moral predicate is applied to a property, the sentence is true. When it is not, the sentence is false. Some moral realists seem to be agreeing with the point, too. The moral realist, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (1986: 3), seems to hold fast to the principle of bivalence, as he thinks that the moral claims are literally, or determinately, true or false. Accepting only classical logic makes my thesis harder to

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<sup>18</sup> For example, treatment to future contingent sentences such as “There will be a sea battle tomorrow” and liar sentences “this sentence is false” seems to require us to give up on classical logic because these sentences do not appear to obey the principle of bivalence. However, these cases are not of my interest.



prove because I cannot accept a non-classical explanation of indeterminacy. I add a supplementary tenet regarding logic (L):

**(L1) BIVALENCE: For all sentences in the moral domain, they are either true or false.**

Once we have the principle of bivalence, it is easier to derive the law of excluded middle from the principle.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, a tenet on the law of excluded middle is added:

**(L2) THE LAW OF EXCLUDED MIDDLE: For any moral sentence p, either p or not p.**

### 2.3 Truthmaker Theory for Moral Realism

In this section, I argue that moral realism needs to be strengthened with a more relatively robust account of truth because of the problem of creeping minimalism. As we have seen in the previous sections, the notion of truth deals with how the world is. A truth-value is assigned to the truth-bearer which meaningfully makes claims about what the world is like. When the truth-bearers, such as beliefs, propositions, sentences, and utterances, are in accord with the reality or represent a fact, they are true. In this section, I clarify the notion of truth that moral realists should accept. I first argue that realists cannot be minimalists about everything. Second, I argue that realists would want to accept a truthmaker theory over other truth theories such as deflationism or correspondence theory of truth.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, A valid derivation of BIV from LEM and T-schema ("p" is true iff P) has been proposed by Susan Haack (1975: 67-68). She construes it as follows:

1	$T'p' \leftrightarrow p$	T-schema
2	$p \vee \neg p$	Excluded Third
3(3)	p	Assumption
4(3)	$T'p'$	Def. of ' $\leftrightarrow$ ' and MPP (1,3)
5(5)	$\neg p$	Assumption
6(5)	$T'\neg p'$	$\neg p/p(1)$ ; Def. of ' $\leftrightarrow$ ' and MPP(1,5)
7(3)	$T'p' \vee T'\neg p'$	Introduction of adjunction (4)
8(5)	$T'p' \vee T'\neg p'$	Introduction of adjunction (6)
9	$T'p' \vee T'\neg p'$	elimin. of assumptions (2,3,5,7,8)
10	$T'p' \vee F'p'$	Def. of 'F' (9)

### *2.3.1 The Problem of Creeping Minimalism*

In this section, I motivate the problem of creeping minimalism and argue that realists need to seriously respond to this problem. In §2.1, I formulated a version of minimal moral realism which accepts (M), (S1), and (S2). If a moral realist accepts only (S1), (S2), and (M), there is a worry that nowadays there is no difference between moral realism and anti-realism (Asay 2013, Simpson 2018). It is because both realists and anti-realists take the semantic or psychological notions like truth and belief into account to explain moral matters. The problem is called “creeping minimalism.” This problem is worrisome for realists because the line that divides moral realists from anti-realists becomes blurry when the quasi-realist program starts to resemble realism more and more.<sup>20</sup>

During the “good old days,” as Dreier (2004) says, only moral realists could claim that there are moral propositions, truths, facts, and properties. The emotivists like A. J. Ayer (1936) claimed that there are no moral propositions. Known as the arch error-theorist, J. L. Mackie (1977) denied the existence of moral properties; therefore, concluding that all moral sentences were false.<sup>21</sup>

Nowadays, adopting deflationary or minimalist notions of propositions, truth, facts, and properties, there is nothing that contemporary expressivists cannot accept. What has happened here is that moral propositions, truths, facts, and properties, which used to belong to moral realism exclusively, can also be claimed by moral anti-realists who are willing to adopt deflationism or minimalism about truth.<sup>22</sup> Once the merits of the minimalist view on truth are acknowledged, anti-realists start to embrace everything – moral propositions, truths, facts, and properties – which are

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<sup>20</sup> Karen Bennett (2009) identifies such blurring with the effect of ‘difference-minimization’.

<sup>21</sup> To be more accurate, Mackie (1977: 15-17) claimed that his error theory is purely a second-order view. He insisted that his second-order error theory is logically independent of any first-order moral views. Therefore, the first-order moral claims, claims regarding what we morally ought to do or ought not to do, can still be true or false. However, there is some dispute over how to interpret Mackie’s error theory, whether it really has no implications on the first-order moral theories. See Olson (2011).

<sup>22</sup> See Blackburn (2006) and Schroeder (2008), developing semantics for moral anti-realism with deflationism.

the crucial elements that the realists exclusively and originally claimed. James Dreier (2004) has already foreseen the problem of creeping minimalism:

Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts. If successful, it can help expressivism recapture the ordinary realist language of ethics. But in so doing it also threatens to make irrealism indistinguishable from realism. That is the problem of Creeping Minimalism (26).

Nowadays, moral anti-realists endorse moral truths. I will explain in detail in the next section, but to explain briefly, Simon Blackburn (1998) and Allan Gibbard (2003) seek to claim everything that moral realists claim. For example, anti-realists can now say that “‘Murder is wrong’ is true.” As a quasi-realist, Blackburn (1998: 79, 311-312) accepts that moral propositions and truths represent moral facts which can be mind-independent. According to Blackburn (2010: 4), our moral thoughts are beliefs; such a claim used to be asserted by moral realists. Michael Ridge (2007b), who is an ecumenical expressivist, accepts truth-aptness of normative discourse while holding expressivism at the same time.<sup>23</sup> The motivation behind hybrid expressivism, defended by Mark Schroeder (2015), is to be an expressivist about truth yet to give an account for the semantics of complex sentences with moral parts. Expressivists now understand moral sentences as expressing components about our belief and attitude, namely propositions, the fundamental bearers of truth and falsity. Since they endorse moral truths, anti-realism no longer demands scepticism about morality.<sup>24</sup>

In the face of creeping minimalism, what should moral realists do? There are several responses. First response is that it’s not the case that realism starts collapsing into anti-realism through minimalism.<sup>25</sup> It’s the other way around. Anti-realism starts looking like realism, so it’s bad for anti-realism. In other words, realists should happily accept deflationism and consider it as one of the ways to be a realist. For

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<sup>23</sup> Ecumenical expressivists say that normative statements express hybrid, relational states of mind. These are complex states comprised of both representational and nonrepresentational component.

<sup>24</sup> In Fine (2001)’s terms, such forms of anti-realisms are non-sceptical.

<sup>25</sup> This is the point that Crispin Wright makes. He thinks that anti-realism with minimalist notion of truth collapses into realism. See Wright (1985).

example, that is the move that ‘relaxed moral realists’ make. The second response is that moral realists can try to adopt more robust types of truth-theories which have metaphysical implications, such as a correspondence notion of truth or truthmaker theory.

In §2.4.2, I argue that the first response is not satisfactory enough. Realists can happily accept minimalism about truth but only conditionally. If one is a moral realist who wants minimalism about truth, one needs to supplement realism with a more robust and substantive theory of facts or propositions. In other words, a moral realist cannot be a minimalist about everything and still be a realist.

Regarding the second response, I argue that, for moral realism, truthmaker theory is a better theory than a correspondence theory of truth. In §2.4.3, I argue that a moral realist does not have reasons to accept the correspondence theory of truth. In §2.4.4, I argue that a moral realist has most reason to accept truthmaker theory. Such a characterization of truth in moral realism will help us talk about metaphysical and semantic indeterminacy in the later chapters.

### *2.3.2 Combining Only Minimalism and Realism Is Not Good Enough*

In this section, I argue that realists cannot just accept minimalism about truth. If a realist wants to accept minimalism about truth, she needs a substantive theory about facts, beliefs, or propositions to supplement the realist picture. Minimalism about truth, only by itself, is not good enough for realism.

Let me start with explaining what minimalism about truth is and why anti-realists would welcome minimalism. Simply put, minimalism is one of the ways to interpret deflationism about truth. Since Tarski, truth schema -  $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff  $p$  - has been central to the discussions about truth. If one is a deflationist about the T-schema, the instances of T-schema are conceptually and explanatorily fundamental. However, if one is an inflationist about the T-schema, truth is not deflated to the T-schema. Truth is something that robustly exists out in the world.

Deflationism about truth is popular nowadays. According to Daniel Stoljar and Nic Damnjanovic (2010), there are two reasons for the popularity of deflationism. One reason is that deflationism treats truth as a semantic notion, taking its place along with other semantic notions such as reference, meaning, and content. The other reason regards its anti-metaphysical stance: “Deflationism seems to deflate a grand metaphysical puzzle, a puzzle about the nature of truth, and much of modern philosophy is marked by a profound scepticism of metaphysics”.<sup>26</sup> While there are many varieties of deflationism, I focus on minimalism in my thesis.

Advocated by Horwich (1998a, 1998b), minimalism takes truth to have a fundamental logico-expressive function. Minimalistic truth is a useful device that helps us make logical inferences. For example, from the proposition that the Earth circles around the Sun, we infer that it is true that the Earth circles around the Sun, and vice versa. This feature allows us to use language expressively, especially about acceptance of a collection of claims. For example, if one is a devout Catholic, she can say that “everything the pope said about theological matters is true.”

The key feature of minimalistic truth that I want to focus on is its epistemological role. The T-schema is epistemologically fundamental in that linguistically competent language users are disposed to accept the instances of the schema (Armour-Garb 2012: 271). In other words, the meaning of truth is fixed by the language users’ inclination to accept the instances of T-schema. When we assert that “It is true that P”, we are not predicating a robust notion of truth to the statement. Rather, it is merely asserting that P. So, we can say that minimalism about truth is the view that truth is given by something like an assertibility-relation between sentences, rather than a metaphysics of truth.

Therefore, applying minimalism about truth to moral anti-realism, modern day anti-realists, such as expressivists, are happy to explain how moral statements are truth-apt.<sup>27</sup> Following Horwich (1998b: 88), an expressivist can easily appeal to the

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<sup>26</sup> I bracket Eklund (2017)’s objection against deflationism being anti-metaphysical for now.

<sup>27</sup> See M. Smith (1994) for the defence of minimalism in expressivism.



assertibility-relation that the nature of moral sentences can be characterized “by supposing, very roughly speaking, that the meaning of 'X is good' is sometimes given by the rule that a person is in a position to assert it when he is aware that he values X.” For example, if a Utilitarian asserts that “‘Giving to charity is morally good’ is true”, ‘giving to charity is morally right’ is true for the utilitarian iff giving to charity maximizes utility. <p> is true relative to certain norms. Such a position is defended by Allan Gibbard’s norm-expressivism that a moral statement is true for the speaker iff the statement satisfies the norm of the speaker.

A minimalist notion of truth cannot be objectively factual because it inevitably reflects the norms of evaluation from individual speakers. Let’s say that the utterance, “John was kissing Mary”, is true on a certain Saturday night. Such an utterance is, according to Field (1994: 438), “disquotationally true for me iff it is true relative to the time that I regard as appropriate with the implicit indexical in it.” Similarly, moral sentences are “disquotationally true for me iff it is true relative to the norms I regard as appropriate to associate with the evaluative terms” (439). When expressivism is combined with a minimalist notion of truth, “there is no *further* fact here - no fact about nonrelativized oughts, or about which of the norms that we might relativize to is “objectively correct”” (440).

Blackburn is quite optimistic about what expressivism can explain with minimalism about truth on its side. With the minimalistic notion of truth, anti-realists can refute the charge that there is no normativity in moral anti-realism. The objection is such that if the primary function of moral sentences is just expressing the speaker’s own values and attitudes, there is no justification behind applying moral sentences to others. Why ought they follow some values and attitudes from another person, which could be arbitrary and bad? Normativity seems to be lacking in moral sentences asserted by anti-realists.

However, adopting minimalism about truth, one can secure normativity by appealing to intersubjectivity, possibly appealing to the norm of the society. “Slavery is a bad system” is equivalent to “It is true that slavery is bad”. In what sense is it

true? Blackburn (1998: 305) argues that such a sentence is equivalent to “Our opinion is this: slavery is a bad system.” And even more, by saying that “Slavery is a bad system. That is an *opinion* reflecting an independent order of reason”, an expressivist can claim something about normative truth in moral sentences. So far, minimalism about truth combined with expressivism seems to be good for anti-realists, not for realists.<sup>28</sup> It is because the notion of truth has changed to reflect the norms of the speakers, not reflecting the objective moral facts in the world, which are unchangeable regardless of what opinions or norms the speakers hold.

Therefore, if a moral realist adopts *just* the minimalist notion of truth, such a notion cannot deliver what the realist wants from truth. What realists want is objectivity which is fully factual. Moral realism is a metaphysical-first view which pushes for the existence of objective moral facts. These moral facts are evidence-independent in a way that they are not dependent on social norms or the opinions of some communities. When moral realists say “<p> is true”, <p> should reflect an unchangeable moral fact which does not depend on the opinions of the speakers. A moral realist can certainly employ the minimalist notion of truth, but she would have to adopt a more substantial theory of facts or propositions in order to keep the evidence-independent objectivity solid in her realism. I argue that one of the ways to supplement minimalism is to accept truthmaker theory.

### 2.3.3 Correspondence Theory of truth is also Not Good Enough

If minimalism about truth is not good enough by itself for moral realism, what other truth theories are available? Of course, many theories have been developed to explain the nature of truth.<sup>29</sup> Out of these theories, the correspondence theory of truth seems to be the next runner up for moral realism. The correspondence theory

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Field (1994), too, draws connections from deflationism to vagueness, indeterminacy, and non-factual discourse such as normative and evaluative discourse.

<sup>29</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a survey of these theories. For this see Scharp (2013: 13-15).

of truth, which takes truth to be corresponding to reality, is most popular and has been widely accepted.

It is easy to draw connections between realism and the correspondence theory of truth. Given (M) and (S2), moral realists have reasons to endorse the correspondence theory of truth: there are moral facts in the world, and the moral sentences that are true correspond with the facts. The correspondence truth is commonly associated with a form of realism because the correspondence relation between propositions with the objective reality satisfactorily determines truth.<sup>30</sup> Given that there are evidence-independent, objective moral facts in the world, the propositions that correspond to the objective world are assigned of true truth-values.

In fact, we can find moral realists who make this move. Enoch (2011) endorses “a pre-established harmony” which is responsible for correlating moral facts to moral beliefs. For example, there is a moral fact that survival is good: we develop moral beliefs corresponding to what is good because evolution is directed to survival (169). The fact that survival is good pre-establishes the harmony between normative truths and normative beliefs. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) claim that moral sentences are true when they correspond to moral fixed points, a battery of substantive moral propositions that are non-naturalistic conceptual truths.

However, the correspondence theory of truth does not seem to do the job that the realists want it to do. The correspondence notion is too platitudinous so that even the enemies of the correspondence truth accept the notion of truth as corresponding to facts.<sup>31</sup> There is nothing substantial about the claim that truth corresponds with the facts. The corresponding relation is trivial and vacuous that there is no theoretical weight behind it (Blackburn 1984). If almost everyone accepts such a platitude about truths, correspondence truth theorists would have to claim something more substantial. The correspondence notion of truth seems to be no

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<sup>30</sup> According to Devitt (1991:42), “Sentences of type *x* are true or false in virtue of (1) their structure, (2) the referential relations between their parts and reality, (3) the objective and mind-independent nature of that reality.”

<sup>31</sup> For example, Blackburn, Horwich, Grover, Wright, and Hill all agree that truth corresponds to reality: truth is platitudinous.

different from the deflationary notion of truth: e.g. “It is true that snow is white iff snow is white.”

Is there a way to bring in a more substantial notion of truth without saying something tautological such as “truths are true because they are true”? Dummett (1958: 157) gives us a hint:

the correspondence theory expresses one important feature of the concept of truth which is not expressed by the law “It is true that p if and only if p” and which we have so far left quite out of account: that a statement is true only if there is something in the world *in virtue of* which it is true.

The correspondence relation should be substituted with a more substantial relation: facts are the objects *in virtue of* which truths are true. I argue that the relation that is captured by ‘in virtue of’ should imply truths as carrying ontological and metaphysical commitments (Asay 2011: 108). If one’s a realist, then the intuition that lies behind the notion of truth must be grounded in the world itself, not to the correspondence relation, but to the existence of worldly facts and objects, namely truthmakers.

### *2.3.4 Truthmakers for Moral Realism*

Since I have shown that a minimalist notion of truth or the correspondence notion of truth is not good enough for doing the job that the realists want truth to do, I need to provide a better option for realists. I suggest a truthmaking theory, accepting Asay’s (2013) proposal. This move will later be useful for explaining metaphysical indeterminacy in metaethics.

In virtue of what is some truth true? As a branch of metaphysics, truthmaker theory offers truthmakers for making the truths true. Truth depends upon the existence of its truthmaker. The truth of a truth-bearer – whether it is a sentence, proposition, belief – is owed to something in the world. The truth of a sentence, “There are three peaches on the table,” is made true by the existence of three peaches

on this very table. If the truth-bearer is false, the world must have been different: there is one apple or two peaches on the table instead. The sentence is true because of the truthmakers in the world. Such a truthmaking relation is a grounding relation: truthmakers are ontologically responsible for the truths.

According to Devitt (1991) and Asay (2013), realism is strictly a metaphysical position. For Asay, “moral realism is about moral reality, and reality is the domain of metaphysics” (219). Suggesting (M), I take realism to be the ontological thesis about the *existence* of an evidence-independent world, not whether a moral sentence is true or false, or whether we have epistemic access to moral truths. If one construes moral realism with the semantic thesis such as “moral sentences are truth-apt”, then it is putting the semantic or epistemological cart before the metaphysics horse, as Michael Devitt (1991) claims. For moral realists, the ontological basis for moral truths is mind-independent moral facts and properties. Moral truths depend on the *existence* of mind-independent moral facts and properties. Therefore, it seems important for moral realists to define moral facts with a metaphysically heavy notion – with truthmakers.

According to Asay, “there is the linguistic conception of facts as *truths*, and the metaphysical conception of facts as *truthmakers*” (220). While anti-realists and realists can agree that there are the linguistic conceptions of facts as truths, realists must go a step further and say that truthmakers are needed to make true to the linguistic facts as truths. While anti-realists are committed to the linguistic conception of *facts*, realists should be committed to the metaphysical conception of facts as *truthmakers*.

There can be many ways to adhere to different types of truthmakers.<sup>32</sup> Moral realists can adopt a metaphysical sense of facts, which are compound or structured entities, which would be suitable for truthmaking. According to David Armstrong (1997), facts are called ‘states of affairs.’ Facts are non-mereological compounds of

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<sup>32</sup> For example, one can adhere to the Armstrong (1997)’s theory of truthmaking that makes use of facts or states of affairs, or take tropes as candidate for truthmakers (e.g., Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984)



universals and particulars. ‘a is F’ is true when some particular *a* instantiates the universal *F*. If a particular *a* instantiates a universal *F*, the fact ‘a is F’ exists. Otherwise, it does not. Likewise, moral facts would be composed of particulars and universals. In every possible world, if there is some object *a* (the particular) which instantiates the property *goodness* (the universal), then *a* will be good. These universals – the moral properties – are combined with the particulars to compose facts – the states of affairs. Such facts can be adequate truthmakers for robust moral realism: moral facts are true *in virtue of* truthmakers.

Rejecting Armstrong’s notion of states of affairs, moral realists can instead exclusively commit themselves to metaphysical moral properties instead of moral facts, just as Dunaway (2016) and Jonathan Dancy and Christopher Hookway (1986) do. Metaphysically robust moral properties (Dunaway calls them ‘elite’ properties) can be a proper ontological ground for moral claims. One can think of moral properties as tropes, ontologically unstructured abstract particulars, which can serve as truthmakers for moral predications.<sup>33</sup>

It is not the scope of my paper to examine whether explaining moral properties with tropes or moral facts with the states of affairs is better. I am not claiming that adhering to either of these views is without problems.<sup>34</sup> All I am claiming is that moral realists should accept the existence of moral facts or properties which are metaphysically heavy-weighted so that it can provide the ontological ground for moral truth: they are truthmakers.<sup>35</sup> In virtue of existence of such properties and facts, moral truths become true.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> D. C. Williams (1953) first suggested that tropes are the bearers of final moral value: to claim that what we value are the particular properties of things – tropes – is *prima facie* intuitive. Campbell (1981) also thought that tropes are especially suited for serving the purpose for being value-bearers.

<sup>34</sup> Against Armstrong, Lewis (1992) has denied that there is room for non-mereological composition. For discussion, see McDaniel (2009). Against trope theory, see Stjernberg (2003).

<sup>35</sup> This is similar to Schaffer’s (2010) view of truthmaking: *x* is a truthmaker for *y* if and only if *x* grounds the truth of *y*.

<sup>36</sup> Fabrice Correia (2014) identifies truth-making with grounding. If Correia also accepts fundamentality-based conception of grounding, there is an option of accepting both a gradated view of reality and truth-making thesis. Thanks to Dos Dosky for pointing this out.

Asay (2011) argues that truthmaker theory is a better theory for motivating realism than a correspondence theory of truth. One of the advantages of truthmaker theory is that the truthmaking relation can be one-many or many-many while the correspondence relation is strictly one-one.<sup>37</sup> According to the correspondence theorist, the world is composed of facts which come in various shades: positive, negative, existential, ethical, aesthetic, counterfactual, etc. A distinct single fact has a correspondence relation to a truth. While a correspondence relation requires a distinct kind of fact for its truth, in a truthmaker theory anything can be (and everything is) a truthmaker: facts, properties, objects, etc. According to Asay (2011: 113), “Take any existing entity *x*: *x* is a truthmaker for the truth that *x* exists.” Since the world is a world of truthmakers, truthmaker theories are more flexible in accommodating the correspondence intuition. The truthmaking theory would better motivate moral realists’ tenets since moral realists claim that not only do moral facts exist, but also properties. Since properties can be truthmakers for moral truths, moral realists can happily adopt truthmaker theory over the correspondence theory of truth for substantially grounding their truths.<sup>38</sup>

One of the objections that I could expect is that, just as I treated the correspondence relation as trivial, one might treat the truthmaking relation as trivial too. To some, there seems to be no difference between the correspondence relation and truthmaking relation. Both describe the relation between how the world gets represented. I argue that the truthmaking relation is more substantial and fundamental than the correspondence relation because the truthmaking relation is a robust asymmetric relation: it is what grounds the truth (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005: 19-19). Being metaphysically primitive, the truthmaking relation explains how moral

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<sup>37</sup> Of course, there are many other advantages of preferring truthmaker theory over a correspondence theory of truth. See Asay (2011: 102-120).

<sup>38</sup> If my argument holds, it gives a reason to prefer Barnes’s account of ontic indeterminacy over J. R. G. Williams’s (2008a) because his account takes the correspondence relation to play a key role in his indeterminate possible worlds account.

truths are true in virtue of truthmakers.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, we can add a new supplementary tenet regarding truth (T):

(T) Moral truths are made true in virtue of *truthmakers*.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.4 Recap

To recap, here are the tenets for minimal moral realism:

(M) OBJECTIVITY: There are moral facts in the world.

(S1) COGNITIVISM: Moral sentences are truth-apt.

(S2) NO ERROR THEORY: Some moral sentences are true.

Here are the supplementary tenets:

(L1) BIVALENCE: For all sentences in the moral domain, they are either true or false.

(L2) LAW OF EXCLUDED MIDDLE: For any moral sentence p, either p or not p.

(T) TRUTHMAKERS: Moral truths are made true in virtue of *truthmakers*.

When all of these tenets are accepted as constituting moral realism, then it is easy to argue that indeterminacy is compatible with moral realism. It is just classical logic – (L1) and (L2) – that appears to cause problems to indeterminacy. How so? Think about the lucky penny case again. Picking up a lucky penny on the street is permissible. However, picking up a duffle bag full of cash is impermissible. Then is picking up a fifty-pound note on the street permissible? It's hard to tell. It seems like it is indeterminate as to whether or not it is permissible. However, a moral realist cannot allow for indeterminacy. (L1) says, "Picking up a fifty-pound note on the street is permissible" should be either true or false, not indeterminate. How can a

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<sup>39</sup> To see how the grounding relation and truthmaking relation connect up together, see Jonathan Schaffer (2008).

<sup>40</sup> This is to adopt Asay's (2011) *methodological maximalism* about truthmakers. It "does not outright assume the bold metaphysical thesis that all truths have truthmakers, but instead is open to the possibility that there are truthmaker gaps (even beyond analytic truths)" (59).

moral realist explain such indeterminacy while retaining classical logic? Before I explain how so, I want to explain what indeterminacy is and with what kind of moral indeterminacy I am concerned in chapter 3.

### **3. Three Types of Indeterminacy and Moral Indeterminacy**

In metaethics, moral indeterminacy has been receiving a lot of attention these days. These debates especially focus on agents making rational decisions when there is moral uncertainty (Dunaway 2017, Dougherty 2016, J. R. G. Williams 2016) and on value incommensurability and comparability (Broome 1997, Chang 2016, Andersson 2016). In this chapter, I explain these moral indeterminacies in terms of semantic, metaphysical, and epistemic indeterminacy, following the standard way of classifying vagueness.

It is important to explain how each type of indeterminacy affects moral indeterminacy for two reasons. First, it is because each type of indeterminacy has its own place in moral indeterminacy. It is not the case that *all* moral indeterminacy is reducible to semantic, metaphysical, or epistemic indeterminacy.<sup>41</sup> Some moral indeterminacy is semantic; some moral indeterminacy is metaphysical; some moral indeterminacy is epistemic.<sup>42</sup> When we classify moral indeterminacy into semantic, metaphysical, and epistemic indeterminacy, we better understand the structure of moral indeterminacy affecting moral disagreement in distinctive ways. I will come back to talking about moral disagreement in chapter 5.

Second, it is important because distinguishing three types of indeterminacy allows me to suggest a version of moral realism that is compatible with such

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Schoenfield (2015) argues that all moral indeterminacy is metaphysical indeterminacy. Including Russell, many philosophers have argued that vagueness is purely a semantic phenomenon.

<sup>42</sup> Notice the contrast here that in the vagueness literature, semantic vagueness is accepted as a standard position while epistemicism is considered incredulous (Keefe and Smith 1996: 18), and ontic vagueness is judged unintelligible (Dummett 1975: 314; Lewis 1986: 212).

indeterminacies. I will come back to such suggestions in chapter 4. In this chapter, I focus on introducing three types of indeterminacy and how moral indeterminacy relates to each type of indeterminacy.

As I have shown in chapter 1, it is easy to just give an example of moral indeterminacy. I used an example of picking up five pounds off the ground and an example of sharing a wine bottle with a friend. Dunaway (2017) uses an example of killing an amoeba (and going through an evolutionary chain of creatures) to save a person. Dougherty (2016) gives an example of abortion (when does a zygote become a person?) and late party (when is it too late to hold a noisy party?). Providing these examples of moral indeterminacy is good for pumping our intuitions; we can see straight away that there are morally indeterminate cases. However, looking at the examples of moral indeterminacy can only scratch the surface of the phenomenon. Therefore, I examine what semantic, metaphysical, and epistemic indeterminacies are and how moral indeterminacy relates to each type of indeterminacy. Then I argue that moral realism is compatible with semantic, metaphysical, and epistemic moral indeterminacy.

In §3.1, I divide up the structure of indeterminacy into names/objects-indeterminacy, predicates/properties-indeterminacy, and sentences/states of affairs-indeterminacy. I argue that the core phenomenon of indeterminacy lies in indeterminacy in a multiple range of reference application. In §3.2, I list different types of semantic indeterminacy related to contextualism and vagueness to describe what semantic moral indeterminacy looks like. In §3.3, I describe what metaphysical indeterminacy is, especially related to states of affairs, and explain what metaphysical moral indeterminacy looks like. In §3.4, I introduce epistemicism and explain what epistemic moral indeterminacy looks like. Based on the analysis of this chapter, I suggest a way for moral realists to explain each type of indeterminacy in chapter 4.



### 3.1 Dividing up the structure of Indeterminacy

What is indeterminacy?<sup>43</sup> Indeterminacy is, roughly put, that out of the available alternatives that could hold, there is no fact of the matter that holds determinately.<sup>44</sup> In philosophy, indeterminacy is prevalent. To give a familiar example, in philosophy of time, the idea of open future holds that the propositions about the future are indeterminate (whereas the propositions about the past are unchanging, fixed, or closed). Aristotle's famous future contingent sentence, "There will be a sea-battle tomorrow", does not seem to be true or false. If the sentence is true, on what grounds is the sentence true when the future event has not taken place yet? If the sentence is false, how are we sure that we blocked all the possibilities that lead to the sea-battle tomorrow (Øhrstrøm and Hasle 2015)? In philosophy of language, Quine talks about indeterminacy in translation, asking whether there is a single, determinate way of translating a language when there are many equally correct ways to translate. When a native speaker of the unknown language says 'gavagai' when he sees a rabbit, 'gavagai' could mean lots of things. It could be a rabbit, a jumping rabbit, a rabbit's leg, or many other things related or unrelated to the rabbit. Out of many possible meanings, it is indeterminate whether there is a unique translation of a word (Quine 1960: 37).

These examples tell us three important structures of indeterminacy in our language: *sentence*-indeterminacy, *name*-indeterminacy, and *predicate*-indeterminacy.<sup>45</sup> The first example, open future, is concerned with *sentence-indeterminacy*: the indeterminate truth-value of certain types of sentences, such as future contingent sentences. Should we still hold on to the principle of bivalence even if the future contingent sentences do not seem to have a truth-value, or adopting a 'truth-value gap' approach, should we leave the truth-value empty for these

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<sup>43</sup> Indeterminacy may be related to uncertainty, unquantifiability, unprovability, unpredictability, unobservability, or undecidability, but not equivalent to it.

<sup>44</sup> See Taylor (2018) for the minimal characterization of indeterminacy. On the other hand, according to Azzouni and Bueno (2008), it's surprisingly tricky to pin down what there being no fact of the matter about something really amounts to.

<sup>45</sup> Hyde (2008) divides up vagueness into name-vagueness, predicate-vagueness, and sentence-vagueness. I divide up indeterminacy likewise in parallel.

sentences? If a future contingent sentence fails to be true or false, can we assign a third truth-value, '1/2' or 'i' which stands for indeterminacy? Commonly, sentence-indeterminacy is understood as a violation of the principle of bivalence. If a sentence fails to be true or false, then the truth-value of the sentence is indeterminate.<sup>46</sup>

The second example, indeterminacy in translation, hints us towards name-indeterminacy and predicate-indeterminacy. Indeterminacy of translation is concerned with the parts of the sentences, such as singular terms and predicates. Is there a definite reference to which the singular term 'gavagai' refer? Or is the term 'gavagai' not precisely defined enough to pick out the unique reference in the world?

According to Frege (as construed by Dummett (2006: 47)), the principle of bivalence is violated by the two features of natural language: predicate-indeterminacy and name-indeterminacy. First, *predicate-indeterminacy*: there are *predicates* that are not well defined, or not defined at all, for every object. For example, "Edinburgh is crowded" fails to be true or false because the predicate, 'is crowded', is not well defined. To see what counts as 'being crowded', do we have to consider the number of people who live in Edinburgh now, or should we count the travellers and visitors in certain seasons as well? Or should we check if the pavements in Edinburgh are usually occupied with pedestrians? There are many ways to define a predicate, and it is unclear which definition holds.<sup>47</sup> Even if some predicates might have clear definitions, they might lack precise application conditions (Raffman 2014: 96), leaving the predicate indeterminate. Vague terms such as 'rich', 'tall', 'bald', 'red' are such examples. If there are sentences that contain these predicates, they fail to be true or false.

Moral terms also exhibit predicate-indeterminacy. Consider 'courageous.' Such a term exhibits predicate-indeterminacy because, as we have seen above, it is not well-defined. To define it roughly, to be courageous is to face danger or risk

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<sup>46</sup> One can call it truth-value gap, too. Shaw (2014: 504) lists several causes of truth-value gaps: "indicative conditionals, with false antecedents, semantic anomaly, non-referring definites and strong presupposition failures more generally, non-referring names."

<sup>47</sup> I will elaborate more on this issue in §3.2.

bravely. Then what counts as facing danger or taking a risk bravely? Again, we can ask what it means to face danger bravely. Even if we found a clear definition for ‘courageous’, it could also lack precise application conditions. What is the necessary and sufficient condition for applying the term, ‘courageous’, to a person or to an action? Indeterminacy in moral predicates concerns the type of reference-indeterminacy: there seem to be no clear application conditions of moral terms.<sup>48</sup>

The second way of violating the principle of bivalence is through *name-indeterminacy*. There are singular terms that do not denote objects because there are no objects to refer to. For example, a definite description, such as ‘the centre of the universe’, fails to denote any object even though we all understand the meaning of the term. Proper names, such as ‘Atlantis’, also fail to denote an object. Therefore, a sentence like “There were many rivers on Atlantis” or “There were many rivers on the lost continent” is neither true nor false because there is no object denoted by the name ‘Atlantis’ or the definite description ‘the lost continent’.

However, singular terms also fail to denote objects, not because there are none, but because there are *too many objects* to choose from.<sup>49</sup> While there is no object to which ‘the lost continent’ refer, there are too many objects to which ‘the smartest person in school’ or ‘the greatest philosopher’ refers. In this case, “Kant is the greatest philosopher” fails to be true or false. Whereas there is no object to which ‘Atlantis’ refers, there is no single object to which ‘Edinburgh’ refers because there are many ways to draw the boundary of Edinburgh.<sup>50</sup> If I am standing on the boundary of Edinburgh, “I am in Edinburgh” fails to be true or false.

Another example is from Taylor and Burgess (2015: 298). When one says that it is semantically indeterminate whether Kilimanjaro contains more than  $n$  molecules, the name ‘Kilimanjaro’ fails to pick out a unique, mountain-shaped composite of

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<sup>48</sup> Shafer-Landau (1994: 334) refers to it as conceptual vagueness because many moral concepts are fuzzy around the edges, lacking “precise definitional criteria and so incompletely fix their extension.”

<sup>49</sup> Whether there can be a singular moral term remains unknown. Is ‘justice’ a singular term?

<sup>50</sup> Similarly, consider a 10-pound cat, Tibbles. If there is 9-pound part of Tibbles, which consists of all of Tibbles but his tail, is he still Tibbles? This is a well-known problem in metaphysics, known as mereological essentialism (Burke 1996).

molecules. Rather, there are many mountain-shaped composites of molecules. This would be an example of indeterminacy in picking out one correct reference for the term.

So far, I have listed some structures of indeterminacy that occur in our language: sentence-indeterminacy, name-indeterminacy, and predicate-indeterminacy.<sup>51</sup> Also, I pointed out that the essential feature of indeterminacy in our language is indeterminacy in reference.<sup>52</sup> The reference of the sentence, name, or predicate is indeterminate in a way that either there is no reference or there are too many references that a term could refer to.<sup>53</sup> This division will help us compare semantic indeterminacy with metaphysical indeterminacy in §3.3: Name-indeterminacy corresponds to object-indeterminacy, predicate-indeterminacy to property-indeterminacy, and sentence-indeterminacy to states-of-affairs-indeterminacy. Before I explain metaphysical indeterminacy in §3.3, more needs to be said about types of semantic indeterminacy in language, especially related to vagueness and Sorites. I explain what semantic indeterminacy is in §3.2. I will talk about epistemic indeterminacy in §3.4.

### **3.2 Semantic Indeterminacy**

In this section, I introduce different types of semantic indeterminacy and show how some moral terms are semantically indeterminate. Semantic indeterminacy is prevalent, maybe too prevalent. It lies as an undeniable characteristic of the representational feature of our language. Borrowing words from Bertrand Russell (1923: 89), indeterminacy in our language can be compared to a smudged photograph. Our words attempt to represent how the world is, but they are too

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<sup>51</sup> Fine (1975: 267) thinks that all vagueness can be reduced to predicate-vagueness. Keefe (2000: 14) thinks that primary bearer of vagueness should be sentences. I don't side with either of them.

<sup>52</sup> The same explanation applies to indeterminacy in moral language. Regarding what is meant by the question of what one ought to do about this or that, Wiggins says "indeterminacy or underdetermination is revealed in the reference and extension of certain moral words or in certain combinations of them" (Wiggins 1990: 77).

<sup>53</sup> Such a characterization is to agree with Raffman (2014)'s Multiple Range Theory of Vagueness.

coarse-grained to accurately describe how the world actually is. These words fail to pick out the references that they represent.

As Schroeder (2012) points out, if one is a metaethicist, she would want to understand how moral language works because she would want to discover how ordinary speakers manage to successfully talk about moral facts and properties.<sup>54</sup> Particularly, moral realists should be more interested in the theory of reference – metasemantics – because they are interested in not only “how people could succeed at talking about the same thing as one another, even while having very different ideas about the extension of those terms” (707), but also how the truth-value of the moral sentences is determined from objective moral reality. Therefore, many metaethicists would want to understand how semantic indeterminacy works, which could be a helpful tool explaining why people succeed or fail to communicate moral concepts to each other.

Of course, moral realists can simply deny semantic indeterminacy: moral language is, in fact, semantically determinate. This move is, indeed, what many moral realists make when they face semantic indeterminacy.<sup>55</sup> Commonly, moral realists accept reference magnetism to explain away semantic indeterminacy.<sup>56</sup> According to reference magnetism, moral properties causally act as reference

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<sup>54</sup> There have been attempts to understand moral semantics. There are two ways to divide up moral terms: thick/thin or evaluative/normative. The former division is first adopted by B. Williams (1985) and endorsed by Väyrynen (2011) and Roberts (2013). Thin terms include ‘right’, ‘good’, ‘wrong’, ‘bad’, ‘permissible’, and ‘ought’. These terms are called ‘thin’ because they are purely evaluative. On the other hand, thick terms include ‘pious’, ‘courageous’, ‘shrewd’, ‘selfish’, ‘gullible’ and more; they are called ‘thick’ because evaluative and non-evaluative descriptions are both included in thick terms. For example, being pious is not only religiously evaluated as something good, but also a description of one’s faithfulness and dedication. The combination of both evaluative and non-evaluative description makes a term ‘thick.’

Another way of dividing up moral terms is to separate evaluative terms from normative terms. Such division is endorsed by Plunkett and Sundell (2013), Tappolet (2014), and Chrisman (2018). Evaluative terms include ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘admirable’, and ‘fair’; normative or deontic terms include ‘ought’, ‘right’, ‘wrong’, and ‘permissible’. According to Tappolet (2014), the one of the differences between evaluative terms and normative terms is that evaluative terms can take comparative and superlative forms, whereas normative terms do not admit degrees. Tappolet explains that it is because normative terms apply to actions – that you can either perform an action or not perform an action – whereas evaluative terms can be applied to range of things – objects, persons, actions, and states of affairs. Normative terms apply to what is subject to the will of the agent, which is the action, whereas evaluative terms cover more than actions.

<sup>55</sup> Another move that realists can take is to develop ‘conceptual role semantics’ where vague predicates determinately refer to whatever relation which makes certain rules of inference for practical reason valid (Wedgwood 2001). I am not considering this view in my thesis. Schoenfield argues that it is still not rigid enough and it falls back to ontic indeterminacy. See Schoenfield (2015: 271-276).

<sup>56</sup> For example, see Dunaway and McPherson (2016).

magnets.<sup>57</sup> Certain properties are better candidates for the reference of our terms than others. The magnetic pull of this property attracts the reference of the word across a variety of usage patterns. Although learning the referent of ‘permissible’ through the usage in our linguistic community would tell us what is morally permissible, it is guided by the magnetic pull of moral properties. Learning the referents of moral terms from language usage also involves learning the metaphysically privileged referents of moral terms. Therefore, there is no need for moral realists to endorse semantic indeterminacy if reference magnetism is true.

However, there are many reasons to reject reference magnetism if one is a moral realist. First, a non-naturalist moral realist, such as Enoch (2011: 101), would deny that moral properties are causally efficacious. Moral facts and properties do not have any causal effect on us or our language, just as abstract objects like numbers do not have any causal power over and above us. Second, even if there are metaphysically privileged properties, it is doubtful how this ‘pull’ works. It seems rather magical that moral properties have such a magnetic power to control certain language usage. Therefore, in this section, I develop my arguments based on the assumption that moral realists would want to explain semantic indeterminacy because they acknowledge the fact that semantic indeterminacy is prevalent.

I will first lay out the types of semantic indeterminacy and then show how moral terms and sentences fit into these types of semantic indeterminacy. The scope of my research is going to be limited only to moral sentences with quantifiers. A moral sentence is a sentence consisting of one or more moral terms. For example, a moral sentence such as “abortion is wrong” will be read as “*all* murder is wrong” or “*some* murder is wrong”. In other words, I will not treat these moral sentences as generic statements, such as “In general, murder is wrong.”

In this section, I explain different types of semantic indeterminacy: context-sensitivity, spectrum vagueness, and multidimensional vagueness. I examine these

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<sup>57</sup> Reference Magnetism is suggested by David Lewis: assignment of contents to expressions of our language is fixed to “the ones that respect the objective joints in nature” (1984: 227).

because they retain classical logic and can be compatible with moral realism. I do not endorse any non-classical treatment of indeterminacy or vagueness – supervaluationism or three-valued logic – because I have argued in chapter 2 that moral realism should be, by default, compatible with classical logic.<sup>58</sup> I will then argue that, in chapter 4, moral realists are able to explain semantic indeterminacy using Raffman (2014)’s Multiple Range Theory of vagueness.

### 3.2.1 Context-Sensitivity

In this section, I introduce context-sensitivity and explain how useful it is for metaethicists to explain semantic indeterminacy. I argue that, even though context-sensitivity is useful, moral realists cannot rely on context-sensitivity only. Shapiro (2013: 307) correctly points out that just about every theorist holds that vague terms are context-sensitive in a way. Without a given context, the reference of a term or a sentence is indeterminate. Since the reference cannot be determined without the context that the word or sentence is used, the references of the vague terms, such as ‘rich’, ‘tall’, ‘red’, are indeterminate when these terms are used without context. Imagine that you overheard somebody saying, “Hana is tall.” Is she tall, compared to kindergarteners? Is she tall compared to the speaker? Or is she tall, compared to basketball players? It is indeterminate what ‘tall’ refers to when the relevant context is not given.

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<sup>58</sup> One can adopt many other non-classical alternatives to assign truth-values to vague sentences. There is a truth-value *glut* if a borderline predication is both true and false. There is a truth-value *gap* if a borderline predication fails to be determinately true or false. Accepting Fine (1975)’s *supervaluationism*, one can still say that the classical tautology, “either  $x$  is  $F$  or  $x$  is not  $F$ ”, is determinately true even if it’s not the case that “ $x$  is  $F$ ” is determinately true, nor is it the case that “ $x$  is  $F$ ” is determinately true. Think of all the uncontentious cases of “ $x$  is  $F$ .” “ $x$  is  $F$ ” is true if it comes out true on all the ways in which we can make the vague predicate “ $F$ ” precise. A borderline case of “ $x$  is  $F$ ” will neither be true nor false because it is true in only *some* of the ways of making “ $F$ ” precise and false on others. However, the form “either  $x$  is  $F$  or  $x$  is not  $F$ ” will still be true no matter what because it will be true whenever a sharp boundary for  $F$  is drawn (Keefe and Smith 1996: 7). Many-valued logic is another option: vague sentences can have more than three-values, such as the true, the false and the indeterminate (Edgington 1997, Tye 1994). One can alternatively adopt degree theories of truth that a borderline predicate can take a whole spectrum of values between 0 and 1 (N. J. J. Smith 2008). My account is also against Stephen Schiffer (2002)’s account that there are no *determinately* true moral propositions.

The application of vague terms can be determined by, in part, shifting verbal dispositions of competent speakers (Raffman 1996). Depending on conversational goals, the interlocutors are free to apply or withhold the application of the vague term in borderline cases (Shapiro 2006: 10). Let's assume that a speaker chooses to apply the term to a borderline case. If the interlocutor agrees with the speaker's application of the term, then a new conversational context or conversational *score* is successfully established.<sup>59</sup> Both speakers agree that the borderline case is included in the extension of a term. Context-sensitivity is useful in explaining semantic indeterminacy because contextualists can say that there is no single context relative to which every usage of the vague terms is true.<sup>60</sup>

In metaethics, there have been attempts to endorse contextualism to explain how moral language works. Metaethical contextualism is mainly advanced by Silk (2017) and Khoo and Knobe (2018). According to Discourse Contextualism, developed by Silk (2017), the participants of the normative discourse supply the body of norms. Silk calls us to imagine that Alice says to Bert, "Sally must give 10% of her income to the poor." The truth-condition of Alice's utterance is that her utterance is true because the norm that Alice endorses requires Alice to give 10% to the poor. If Bert disagrees with Alice, Bert endorses a different norm than Alice does. Here, disagreement between Alice and Bert is not about which set of norms is true. Rather, disagreement concerns which moral norms are "operative in the context" (222). If Alice and Bert carry on the conversation to reach an agreement, they are engaging in a metalinguistic negotiation to decide which norms are appropriate for the context to accept.<sup>61</sup>

Likewise, Khoo and Knobe (2018) develops a version of metaethical contextualism where the truth-condition of an utterance depends on whether interlocutor of the moral discourse accepts or rejects the value that the speaker

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<sup>59</sup> Shapiro uses David Lewis's notion of conversational score.

<sup>60</sup> It is also to be noted that indeterminacy can remain still even after such contextual factors, such as comparison class and paradigm cases, are fixed.

<sup>61</sup> Proponents of the view that normative disagreement is metalinguistic in nature are Plunkett and Sundell (2013) and Ludlow (2014).



proposes.<sup>62</sup> For example, if a divine command theorist says, “abortion is wrong”, the utterance is true only when the interlocutor agrees with the utterance. It is because, by agreeing with the utterance, the interlocutor sets the salient norm of the discourse as the divine command theory. If the norm is not established between the participants, the utterances in that discourse will be indeterminate as there will be no truth-conditions that determine the truth value of the utterances.

Even though context-sensitivity appears to explain semantic indeterminacy, context-sensitivity, only by itself, is not a good enough option for moral realists to endorse to explain semantic indeterminacy. Truth in moral realism is grounded by evidence-independency. Whether an utterance is true in a moral discourse should not completely depend on whether the interlocutors accept the given norm or not. Rather, the truth is determined by objective moral reality. Of course, a context in part determines the meaning and the reference of moral terms. However, context only plays a contingent role for moral realism because the norm of the moral discourse cannot, by itself, determine moral truth.

Schoenfield (2015) makes a similar point that moral realists cannot be contextualists. According to Schoenfield (2015), if moral realists accept what she calls the “shifty view” (namely, contextualism) to explain semantic indeterminacy, they are in trouble. The shifty view claims that the meaning of this vague predicate, ‘is morally permissible’, is shifty, depending on the context. The truth-value of the utterance “ $\phi$  is morally permissible” is context-sensitive because what is morally permissible or not changes, depending on the moral culture and language of the community. There are too many permissible linguistic conventions governing the correct application conditions of moral predicates, which could vary from one linguistic community to another. How can we settle the criteria of correct application conditions for every moral predicate in different linguistic contexts? The community’s usage of language makes the moral truth contingent. If the community

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<sup>62</sup> Their version of contextualism is based on Harman (1975)’s moral group relativism. Dreier (2009) also advocates a form contextualism: speaker relativism.

changes its usage, the truth will change, too. Therefore, moral realists would want to claim that the absolute truth value of “ $\phi$  is morally permissible” does not depend on the community’s language usage. Schoenfield thinks that adhering to the shifty view is not compatible with the tenet, (M) OBJECTIVITY. Regarding moral matters, deliberation<sup>63</sup> – such as weighing reasons, examining justification, assessing intention, and considering moral principles – is more important than looking into language usage (Schoenfield 2015: 265).

I think context plays *some* role in determining the reference of moral terms. Metaethical contextualists are not completely wrong, but Schoenfield is not completely right, either. It’s not a matter of all-or-nothing. Moral realists cannot just be contextualists, but they should appeal to contextualism only partially. I will explain more on this topic in chapter 4 that moral indeterminacy is compared with the semantics of indexicals, which is partially context-sensitive. The character of indexicals determines the meaning of indexicals through its semantic rules, without determining the reference of indexicals. The reference is determined when a context is given. Similarly, context helps us to determine the reference of moral terms, but context, by itself, cannot determine the truth-value of moral sentences.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.2.2 Vagueness as Referential Indeterminacy

Why do we need to understand what vagueness is when the topic of my thesis is indeterminacy? It is because, I think, vagueness is a phenomenon that reflects referential indeterminacy. In this section, I aim to achieve two things. First, I explain what spectrum vagueness and multidimensional vagueness are. Second, I show that, in metaethics, semantic indeterminacy is more related to multidimensional vagueness than spectrum vagueness.

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<sup>63</sup> Moral deliberation is also emphasized by Enoch (2011: 72) as well that it is rationally non-optional for discovering normative truths.

<sup>64</sup> This is the position that Dreier (1990) defends. Thank you, Justin Snedegar, for pointing this out.

One of the traditions in vagueness literature is that many philosophers explain vagueness as a feature of a semantic phenomenon that reflects some kind of indeterminacy.<sup>65</sup> Vagueness is often characterized as having borderline cases, where it is indeterminate whether the vague predicates, such as “bald”, “tall”, “heap”, or “child”, applies to the subjects or not (Keefe 2000: 6).<sup>66</sup> Here’s an example. Hana is borderline tall. Hana is not as tall as average basketball players who are, usually, over 6 feet. Hana is not as short as 5 feet, either. She’s in the middle – approximately 5 feet 6 inches. Then the sentence, “Hana is tall”, seems to have no fact of the matter whether the predicate, “tall”, applies to Hana or not. Then it is indeterminate whether Hana is tall. In other words, the truth-value of the sentence, “Hana is tall”, is indeterminate. It is indeterminate whether “Hana is tall” is true or false. Some say that it might be violating the principle of bivalence because the truth-value of “Hana is tall” appears to be neither true nor false. Furthermore, the law of excluded middle seems to be violated as well because “Hana is tall” and “Hana is not tall” both cannot be held at the same time.

These examples are typically classified as *spectrum* vagueness, also known as soritical, linear, or degree vagueness. ‘Tall’ is associated with a linear scale of height; ‘Bald’ is associated with the number of hair, from 0 to 100,000, attached to one’s scalp.<sup>67</sup> It is called a spectrum or degree vagueness because there is a gradual difference in degree from the definite application of the term to the non-application of the term. There appears to be no precise boundary that divides the application of

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<sup>65</sup> Of course, nowadays many philosophers argue that vagueness is also a metaphysical phenomenon; see Akiba (2004) and Hawley (2002). Metaphysical vagueness will be introduced in §3.3 in detail.

<sup>66</sup> Some philosophers say that incomplete predicates are indeterminate because incomplete predicates draw a sharp tripartite division (whereas vague predicates draw no sharp boundaries). An example of an incomplete predicate is from Sainsbury (1991): ‘child\*’. ‘Child\*’ applies to those who have not reached their sixteenth birthday and does not apply to those who have reached their eighteenth birthday. ‘Child\*’ is not vague. It is precisely defined. To a seventeen-years-old, ‘child\*’ fails to determinately apply or determinately not apply. The fact that there is a sharp tripartite division makes ‘child\*’ an incomplete predicate which, in turn, makes the truth-value of the sentence “A 17-years-old is a child\*” indeterminate. Another well-known example is Patrick Greenough’s (2003: 246)’s “oldster”. Such examples can be continuously created by arbitrarily introducing new words. For example, Soames (1999: 164)’s ‘smidget’, Fine (1975: 120)’s ‘nice<sub>1</sub>’, Tappenden (1993: 556)’s ‘tung’, and N. J. J. Smith (2008: 133)’s ‘schort’. As Glanzberg (2004: 156) points out, it is unclear if there are any naturally occurring examples of predicates like this.

<sup>67</sup> Of course, how the patches of hair are shaped on the head can also be taken into consideration, but I will just follow the standard way of talking about baldness in vagueness.

the term and the non-application of the term. As the example shows above, ‘tall’ fails to draw a precise boundary between Hana being tall (the application of the term) and Hana not being tall (the non-application of the term). Spectrum vagueness is also known as *linear* vagueness because a line is given to represent a continuous gradient. In a linear colour spectrum, red gradually changes to orange (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. From Red to Orange (Change in Hue)*

Of course, such a colour spectrum could vary in saturation (Figure 2) or brightness (Figure 3) as well.



*Figure 2. From Red to Dark Red (Change in Saturation)*



*Figure 3. From Red to White (Change in Brightness)*

Therefore, colours can be vague along more than one linear spectrum. Whereas there is only one way for ‘tall’ to be vague (according to height), as the examples show

above, there is more than one way for a colour to be vague. When there is more than one way to instantiate spectrum vagueness, the term reflects *multidimensional* or *combinatory* vagueness.

Here is another term that exhibits multidimensional vagueness: ‘religion’ (Alston 1967: 219). Out of these nine criteria – (1) having beliefs in supernatural beings, (2) demarcation of sacred objects, (3) ritual acts, (4) moral codes, (5) a certain world view, (6) a way of life, (7) social organization, (8) forms of holy communication with supernatural beings, (9) and spiritual feelings – which of these, combined together, constitute necessary and sufficient condition for religion? Any of the combinations of the subsets could constitute a religion. Hinayana Buddhism lacks a belief in supernatural beings, but it is still a religion. Confucianism does not have a social organization, but it is still a religion. Therefore, it is indeterminate whether all or some of these criteria define a term.

Even if the criteria are settled, there is one more problem. It is indeterminate whether each criterion applies to the correct reference.<sup>68</sup> For instance, if religion must include some forms of holy communication with supernatural beings, praying must count as a form of holy communication. How about singing hymns, reciting holy scriptures, receiving revelations, and speaking in tongues? Maybe. Are there more actions that count as the forms of holy communication? Maybe. Is there an exhaustive list of the forms of holy communication? It seems indeterminate.

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<sup>68</sup> This is what William Alston (1967: 220) pinpoints: “there is a variety of conditions, all of which have something to do with the application of a term. However, we are not able to make any sharp discriminations between those combinations of conditions which are sufficient or necessary for application.”

In sum, there are two main features of multidimensional vagueness. First, when there is more than one way for a term to be vague, it is indeterminate according to which criteria does a term apply to a term. Second, even if these criteria are settled, it is indeterminate whether each criterion applies to the correct reference. The difference between these two features is similar to the difference between vagueness of individuation and vagueness of application, which Alston (1967: 219) points out.<sup>69</sup> The vagueness of individuation is vagueness about where to draw the boundary of a fixed reference, whereas vagueness of application is vagueness about what counts or does not count as a correct reference. For example, ‘mountain’ exhibits vagueness of individuation when there are many ways to draw the boundary of a mountain (Quine 1960: 126). Regarding its spatiotemporal regions, how big should the boundary of a mountain be? In other words, exactly from where does a mountain start and end (Figure 4)?



*Figure 4. Which one is the correct boundary of a mountain?  
(Vagueness of Individuation)*

On the other hand, ‘mountain’ exhibits vagueness of application when it is indeterminate to count something as a mountain or not. Looking at the tallest hill in the world, we might ask, “is this a mountain or not?” Looking at the smallest mountain in the world, we might ask “is this a mountain or not?” (Figure 5)

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<sup>69</sup> This difference is better known as referential/attributional distinction in philosophy of language (Donnellan 1966).



Figure 5. Which one is not a mountain?  
(Vagueness of Application)

As the examples show above, a term exhibits multidimensional vagueness when (1) its criteria are indeterminate and (2) its application is indeterminate. I want to focus more on multidimensional vagueness than linear vagueness because multidimensional vagueness plays an important role in my treatment of semantic moral indeterminacy.

Moral predicates exhibit more multidimensional vagueness than linear vagueness.<sup>70</sup> First, there are many different criteria that constitute moral predicates<sup>71</sup>, and it might be indeterminate to decide on the exhaustive list of the correct criteria. For example, let's say that the moral predicate, 'being morally responsible', is constituted with (a) rationality, (b) self-governance, and (c) capacity to act on the basis of moral considerations.<sup>72</sup> However, the list is not exhaustive. We can keep adding more criteria, such as (d) being worthy of receiving a certain kind of reactive attitudes like praise and blame, (e) a causal connection between the action and its consequence for which the person is responsible, and more. For someone to be morally responsible, does she have to meet all the criteria above? If all apply but (d), is she still a morally responsible person? The answers to these questions are difficult to find because the criteria that constitute moral predicates are not permanently fixed.

<sup>70</sup> Constantinescu (2014) calls it *imprecise gradability*. Boyd (1988) calls it indeterminate *cluster properties* of borderline cases.

<sup>71</sup> Moral predicates "depend on the satisfaction of a number of distinct constitutive criteria for their instantiation" (Shafer-Landau 1995).

<sup>72</sup> An example from Tom Dougherty (2014).

Second, moral terms are applied to many references, may be too many. Consider a moral term, ‘cruelty’. Exhibiting the first feature of multidimensional vagueness, ‘cruelty’ has many criteria. But let’s assume just for now that the correct criterion for ‘cruelty’ is the ‘action that wilfully causes suffering to others’. Then one of the references that ‘cruelty’ might apply to is factory farming. Factory farming is arguably considered as cruel because it causes wilful suffering to cattle (or to any livestock) by confining them in small cages. Is it still cruel if they are let outside one day a week? If so, is it still cruel if they are let out outside two days a week? How about five or six days a week?<sup>73</sup> Again, it is difficult to answer because some of the references to which the term applies might be wrong.

To recap, multidimensional vagueness includes two levels of semantic indeterminacy. First, it is indeterminate which criteria apply to a term. One can say that the meaning of the term is indeterminate or even ambiguous.<sup>74</sup> Second, even if certain criteria are settled, it is indeterminate whether a term refers to something – i.e. it is indeterminate whether that thing is the (or a) referent of the term. There are references to which a term definitely applies and the references to which the term does not definitely apply. In addition, there are references that are indeterminately applied by the term. Then is there a satisfactory semantics of multidimensionally vague moral terms for moral realists when there is semantic indeterminacy? The solution will be given in chapter 4. How does such semantics help moral realists explain moral disagreement? The answer will be given in chapter 5.

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<sup>73</sup> If one is not convinced, the soritical argument can be divided with hourly increments. Is it cruel to cage the cattle just one hour a week? Two hours a week?

<sup>74</sup> For example, Raffman (2014: 107) points out that “soritical vagueness is an unclarity (here, multiplicity) in the reference of a term, whereas multidimensional vagueness is an unclarity in the stable content. Thus understood, multidimensional vagueness is a closer relative to ambiguity than to vagueness.”



### 3.3 Metaphysical Indeterminacy

Metaphysical indeterminacy might be a little bit more difficult to understand than semantic indeterminacy. What does it mean when we say that the world is indeterminate? Unless you are familiar with quantum physics, you might easily think that the world is deterministic. Even if you are familiar with quantum physics, you might think that such indeterminacy only affects micro-atomic particles. The world is deterministic: adenosine triphosphate fuels the cells of every living organism; when you drop things, they always fall to the ground; the Earth goes around the Sun once in every 365.256 days; the laws of nature control the rest, so these laws nomically necessitate how the world is now and in the future. Even if you believe that the open-future thesis – the claim that how things will be in the future is currently unsettled – is true, you might still think that the present world is deterministic in such a way that every event is causally determined by antecedent events and conditions.

It is easier to think that there is little to no indeterminacy in the world. Therefore, many philosophers used to think that metaphysical indeterminacy is unintelligible (Dummett 1975: 314; Lewis 1986: 212). Nowadays, more and more philosophers start to find metaphysical indeterminacy intelligible. For example, Taylor and Burgess (2015), Akiba (2004), E. Barnes (2010), and J. R. G. Williams (2008b) are known to argue for coherency of metaphysical indeterminacy. According to Barnes (2014), “metaphysical indeterminacy is indeterminacy in how things are, rather than how they are described or what we know about them” (339). In other words, it is not just that there is, or may be, indeterminacy in our language or in our knowledge about the world. These philosophers say that, simply put, there is no fact of the matter.

How should we understand what metaphysical indeterminacy is? It would be easier to draw on the divisions that I introduced in §3.1 and §3.2. In §3.1, I pointed out that name-indeterminacy corresponds to object-indeterminacy, predicate-indeterminacy to property-indeterminacy, and sentence-indeterminacy to states-of-

affairs-indeterminacy. Such correspondence relations are assumed because I assume that language represents the world, following Williamson (2005: 700). I assume that sentences represent the states of affairs, names represent objects, and predicates represent properties. Worldly indeterminacy means, therefore, indeterminacy in objects, properties, or states of affairs.

In this section, I aim to achieve three goals. First, I introduce what metaphysical indeterminacy is. Second, I explain how metaethics incorporates metaphysical indeterminacy into some of the discussions regarding value comparisons. Lastly, using Shafer-Landau's example, I explain how classical logic does not seem to be compatible with metaphysical indeterminacy. These three goals are needed because, only after we understand how realists treat metaphysical indeterminacy, I can argue that the kind of moral realism, which I introduced in chapter 2, is compatible with metaphysical indeterminacy in chapter 4.

### *3.3.1 What is Metaphysical Indeterminacy?*

In this subsection, I introduce object-indeterminacy, property-indeterminacy, and states-of-affairs indeterminacy. Then I explain how these types of indeterminacy ambiguate the moral sentences we use.

Let's start with *object-indeterminacy*. When philosophers say that there is indeterminacy in our every day, medium-sized objects, it usually means that the boundary of objects is indeterminate. The spatiotemporal boundary of physical objects, mostly medium-sized objects, is vague. The range of these *medium-sized* objects stretches from small cells to big stars and planets. When a cell division occurs, it is indeterminate when a parent cell stops existing and two or more daughter cells start existing. It is indeterminate where the spatiotemporal boundary of a cell lies.

Consider a 'person'. It seems indeterminate when exactly a person starts existing or stops existing. When does a foetus become a person? Is it when the doctors can see the brain, or when the heart starts pumping? Could it be right before birth or

right after birth? Likewise, is there a specific time when a person stops existing? Is it when a person loses their consciousness, or when the heart stops beating? The answers to these questions are, or at least may be, indeterminate.

One of the best-known examples of object-indeterminacy is from Peter Unger. Endorsing metaphysical indeterminacy of the inanimate objects, such as stones and cups, to the extreme, Unger (1979) famously argued that there are no ordinary things. According to his argument of ‘the sorites of decomposition by minute removals’, there cannot be any stones or cups. If a stone is composed of a million atoms, is the stone without one atom still a stone? Of course, we say yes, and the sorites induction step continues. The stone becomes fully decomposed while we are forced to say that the stone without one atom is still a stone, the stone without one more atom is still a stone, and so forth. Are there clear joints in nature that demarcate objects? According to those who accept object-indeterminacy, no.<sup>75</sup> According to those who do not accept object-indeterminacy, namely epistemicists, there are joints, but these joints maybe unbeknownst to us.<sup>76</sup>

*Property-indeterminacy* refers to the state of properties that could be either instantiated or not. Barnes (2014: 348) gives us a toy example:

Suppose we’ve got two simples, a and b. We’ve also got two spatial regions: simple a is in region 1 and simple b is in region 2. We’ve also got two fundamental properties (or fundamental predicates) F and G. One of each of a and b is one of each of F and G. It’s not the case that both a and b are F, or that both a and b are G. But suppose that’s all that’s settled. Suppose nothing settles whether a is F and b is G, or vice versa. So we either have a case where things are F at 1 and G at 2, or a case where things are G at 1 and F at 2. But we can’t say any more than this.

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<sup>75</sup> See Evans (1978) for arguing against vague objects. See Merricks (2001) for relational indeterminacy. That the identity relations between individuals are indeterminate is defended by the onticists such as Peter van Inwagen (1990), Michael Tye (1990), E. J. Lowe (1994), and Terence Parsons (2000). For vague existence, see Hawley (2002), van Inwagen (1990), Tye (1990), and Smith (2005).

<sup>76</sup> I will discuss epistemicism in detail in §3.4.

We can apply the toy example above to a vague property, ‘tallness’. Let’s say that either Hana is tall or not tall. Nothing settles whether Hana is tall. Whether the property, tallness, is instantiated in Hana is indeterminate.

One could point out that there is nothing special about vague properties being indeterminate. Being indeterminate is exactly what makes vague properties vague. Consider these properties instead: ‘identical to’, ‘better than’, and ‘worse than’. There is nothing indeterminate about the identity relation when we say that a is identical to b. (e.g. Clark Kent is Superman). When there is a moral fact, e.g. saving three drowning children is better than saving two drowning children, the property of “better than” is instantiated in this fact.

However, I do not want to conclude quickly that these properties are not indeterminate. There have been attempts to argue that the identity relation in “a is *identical* to b” is indeterminate. For example, Parsons and Woodruff (1995: 181) argued that “It is indeterminate whether a is identical to b iff there is no property such that a has it and b lacks it (or vice versa), and there is some property that one of them has or lacks and such that the other is indeterminate with respect to having.” The example of such would be Derek Parfit’s personal identity. According to Parfit (1984), when a person A goes through fission, it is indeterminate whether person A is identical to person B or C who has been appeared anew from fission. If person A is identical to person B, then there’s no property that person A has it and b lacks it. But if person A is identical to person B, there is some property that A or B has or lacks, and that person C is indeterminate with respect to having. An example of such property could be where all the atoms in the body are located when person B or C started to exist, or what person B or C has thought when they first started to exist.

So far, we have talked about object-indeterminacy and property-indeterminacy. *Worldly-indeterminacy* refers to indeterminate states of affairs. Taylor and Burgess (2015) explain worldly-indeterminacy as metaphysical indeterminacy which consists “in portions or aspects of reality itself being somehow unsettled, quite independently

of whether and how we think or talk about them” (298).<sup>77</sup> One can easily confuse metaphysical indeterminacy with epistemic or semantic indeterminacy. If one believes that the language which describes the world is indeterminate, then the world, which we gain knowledge through our language, would naturally look indeterminate. Likewise, if our knowledge about the world is indeterminate, then the world itself might look indeterminate as well. However, world-indeterminacy does not depend on epistemic or semantic indeterminacy; the defenders of world-indeterminacy would say. Even if we use a perfect language without any ambiguities, there still can be world-indeterminacy. Even if there is nothing that we do not know about the world, there still can be world-indeterminacy.

If this explanation is too abstract to grasp, another explanation of world-indeterminacy is given by Akiba (2004): To take the world to be indeterminate is to take the world to have the fifth dimension, in addition to the three dimensions of space and the fourth temporal dimension. This fifth dimension is made up of precisified worlds. J. R. G. Williams (2008b: 771) explains in detail:

Suppose that there are a range of perfectly precise ways for reality to be, and suppose reality itself is indeterminate. For simplicity, suppose that there are just two ways, differing in that the first ( $w_1$ ) says that  $p$ , the second ( $w_2$ ) says that  $\neg p$ . Following the line suggested above, however, it may be that in reality it is determinate that  $p \vee \neg p$  but indeterminate which disjunct holds. If all else is equal, then it seems to follow (i) that determinately, either  $w_1$  or  $w_2$  represent reality correctly; but (ii) it is indeterminate whether  $w_1$  represents reality aright, and indeterminate whether  $w_2$  represents reality aright.

To understand Williams’ explanation, let’s go back to the example that I have given in the introduction. In  $w_1$ , it is permissible to take the £5 on the ground; in  $w_2$ , it is impermissible to take the £5 on the ground. Either  $w_1$  or  $w_2$  represents the moral

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<sup>77</sup> One of the simple reasons to believe in metaphysical indeterminacy – that the world is indeterminate – is given by the argument from quantum mechanics (Akiba 2004). It provides, at least, a partial refutation to the idea that everything is determined in the world. According to the current orthodox Copenhagen Interpretation, it is indeterminate whether a particle is located at a specific location  $x$  with a certain momentum  $m$ . Although the debates in quantum mechanics might be irrelevant to the debates that philosophers are having in vagueness, quantum mechanics provides us a reason to accept that there is indeterminacy in the physical world.

reality correctly. However, it is indeterminate whether  $w_1$  or  $w_2$  represents the moral reality aright.

### *3.3.2 Metaphysical Indeterminacy as Precisified Worlds*

Now, let's change the example of world-indeterminacy more complicated by adding more worlds between  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ . This step is necessary for us to understand what metaphysical indeterminacy amounts to because the world is not as simple as the simplified version above. I will complicate the example by bringing in object-indeterminacy and property-indeterminacy. Object-indeterminacy tells us that  $o$ 's boundary is indeterminate. It is indeterminate what  $o$ 's supposed to be when there are too many  $o$ 's from which we can choose. Property-indeterminacy also tells us that it is indeterminate whether  $F$  is instantiated in  $o$  or not. We have seen in the above example that it is indeterminate that the property of being tall is instantiated in Hana.

In addition to object-indeterminacy and property-indeterminacy, world-indeterminacy bring us more indeterminacy into the picture. A state of affairs consists of an object  $o$  and a property  $p$ . There is a state of affairs where, for any object  $o$  and any property  $F$ ,  $o$  has  $F$ . A state of affairs *obtains* if and only if,  $o$  has  $F$ . But how does a state of affairs obtain if it is indeterminate whether  $o$  has  $F$ ? As Williams explained above, the reality is either the case that  $o$  has  $F$  or it is not the case that  $o$  has  $F$ . But it is indeterminate which case represents the reality aright. To recap, there seem to be three layers of metaphysical indeterminacy: an object's boundary is indeterminate; it is indeterminate whether a property is instantiated; it is indeterminate whether a certain state of affairs represents the reality aright.

Here's an example of metaphysical indeterminacy. Consider the moral fact that lying is wrong. If this fact is metaphysically indeterminate, then the object, the action 'lying', and the property, 'wrong', are indeterminate. How so? There are cases of definitely lying and cases that are definitely not lying. There are also borderline cases of lying. For example, saying "you are nice" to a mean person is a lie. Saying "you are nice" to a nice person is not a lie. Saying "you are nice" to a borderline nice person is

a borderline lie. Let's line up the cases of lying, and group the cases into 'lying', 'borderline lying', and 'not lying'.<sup>78</sup> Table (a) below visualizes the first precisification of drawing the boundary of 'lying':

Lying	Borderline Lying	Not Lying
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However, it is also possible to count borderline lying as definitely lying because there could be a world where there are more instances of lying than the instances of not lying, but never the instances of borderline lying. Therefore, table (b) visualizes the second precisification that considers borderline lying as lying:

Lying	Not Lying
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Borderline lying might not be lying in some worlds. Therefore, table (c) visualizes the third precisification that counts borderline lying as not lying:

Lying	Not Lying
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Then we could say that there are three ways to draw the boundary of 'lying': (a), (b), and (c). Next, consider the property, 'wrongness'. The property is either instantiated or not instantiated. Property-indeterminacy tells us that there are instances where it is indeterminate whether the property is instantiated or not. Like we have done above, we line up the cases of instantiations and divide them up into three groups. Table (1) below visualizes how the property is instantiated or not:

Wrongness Instantiated	Indeterminate whether Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated
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<sup>78</sup> Of course, one can group the cases into more than three divisions. For instance, the cases can be divided into 'lying,' 'borderline lying', 'borderline not lying', 'not lying'. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will divide up the groups into three.

However, if it is indeterminate whether ‘wrongness’ is instantiated or not, then just to be safe, we can count all the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness as wrongness. Applying the same division from the table (b) above, we get table (2) below:

Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated
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Or we can count all the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness as not wrong. Applying the same division from the table (c) above, we get table (3) below:

Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated
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Then again, we could say that there are three ways to divide up the instantiations of a property: (1), (2), and (3).

Now, let’s combine (a), (b), and (c) with (1), (2), (3) since a state of affairs consists of an object and a property. There are nine precisifications that could represent the moral reality equally: (a) with (1), (a) with (2), (a) with (3), (b) with (1), (b) with (2), (b) with (3), (c) with (1), (c) with (2), and (c) with (3).


Let’s visualize each precisification of the moral fact that lying is wrong. The first precisification of the moral fact that lying is wrong is visualised below. The table below represents a state of affairs with (a) and (1). In this world, wrongness is instantiated in the cases of lying. Depending on the intention of the speaker or a specific context, a certain speech act could be borderline lying. For the cases of borderline lying, it is indeterminate whether wrongness is instantiated. Let’s call this state of affairs w1:

Lying	Borderline Lying	Not Lying
Wrongness Instantiated	Indeterminate whether Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated




The second precisification is (a) and (2), where three divisions for ‘lying’ stay the same, but there are only two divisions for ‘wrongness’. Either wrongness is instantiated or not instantiated, but the scope of wrongness is wider. All the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness are counted as the definite instantiations of wrongness. The dot below represents a case where borderline lying is wrong. In this world, every borderline lying is wrong. Let’s call this state of affairs w2:

Lying	Borderline Lying	Not Lying
Wrongness Instantiated		Wrongness Not Instantiated




The third precisification is (a) with (3), where three divisions for “lying” stay the same, and there are two divisions for “wrongness” like above. Either wrongness is instantiated or not instantiated, but here the scope of wrongness is narrower. All the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness are not counted as the instantiations of wrongness. The dot below represents a case where borderline lying is not wrong. In this world, every borderline lying is not wrong. Let’s call this state of affairs w3:

Lying	Borderline Lying	Not Lying
Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated	




The fourth precisification is (b) with (1), where there are two divisions for “lying” and three divisions for “wrongness”. Either there are cases of lying or not lying, but all the cases of borderline lying are considered as definite cases of lying. The dot below represents the cases where some cases of lying are neither wrong nor not wrong. In this world, there are some cases of lying that it is indeterminate whether wrongness is instantiated. Let’s call this state of affairs w4:

Lying		Not Lying
Wrongness instantiated	Indeterminate whether Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated




The fifth precisification is (b) with (2), where there are two divisions for “lying” and two divisions for “wrongness”: lying or not lying, and wrong or not wrong. The cases of borderline lying are the cases of lying. Likewise, either wrongness is instantiated or not instantiated, but the scope of wrongness is wider. All the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness are considered as the instantiations of wrongness. In this world, the moral fact that lying is wrong covers a wider scope, including all the indeterminate cases. Therefore, the dot below represents the cases where the borderline cases of lying are considered as the cases of lying, and these cases lying are all wrong. In w4 above, it is indeterminate whether wrongness is instantiated or not in these very cases of lying. In this world, however, wrongness is instantiated in these cases of lying. Let’s call this state of affairs w5:

Lying	Not Lying
Wrongness instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated



The sixth precisification is (b) with (3), where there are two divisions for “lying” and two divisions for “wrongness”. The scope of “lying” stays the same as above, but the scope of “wrongness” changes. Either wrongness is instantiated or not, but all the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness are not counted as the instantiations of wrongness. The dot below represents the cases where some cases of lying are not wrong. Let’s call this state of affairs w6:

Lying	Not Lying
Wrongness instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated



The seventh precisification is (c) with (1), where there are two divisions for “lying” and three divisions for “wrongness”. Either there are cases of lying or not lying, but all the cases of borderline lying are considered as the cases of not lying. The dot below represents the cases where some cases of not lying are neither wrong nor not wrong.

In this world, there are some cases of not lying that it is indeterminate whether wrongness is instantiated. Let's call this state of affairs w7:

Lying	Not Lying	
Wrongness instantiated	Indeterminate whether Wrongness Instantiated	Wrongness Not Instantiated

The eighth precisification is (c) with (2), where there are two divisions for “lying” and two divisions for “wrongness”. Either there are cases of lying or not lying, but all the cases of borderline lying are considered as the cases of not lying. Either wrongness is instantiated or not instantiated, but the cases where it is indeterminate whether wrongness is instantiated or not are considered as the cases of wrongness instantiated. Then blue dot below represents the cases where some borderline cases of lying are considered as the cases of not lying but still wrong to do so. Let's call this state of affairs w8:

Lying	Not Lying	
Wrongness instantiated		Wrongness Not Instantiated

The ninth precisification is (c) with (3), where there are two divisions for “lying” and two divisions for “wrongness”. The scope of “lying” stays the same as above, but the scope of “wrongness” changes. Either wrongness is instantiated or not, but all the indeterminate instantiations of wrongness are not counted as the instantiations of wrongness. Then dot below represents the cases where some borderline cases of lying are considered as the cases of not lying, and they are not wrong. Let's call this state of affairs w9:

Lying	Not Lying	
Wrongness instantiated		Wrongness Not Instantiated

What is the conclusion that we draw from these precisifications? These nine worlds equally represent the moral fact that lying is wrong, but it is indeterminate which world accurately represents the moral reality. How come? It is because there are three different ways to draw the boundary of an object ((a), (b), or (c)) and there are three different ways of a property being instantiated ((1), (2), or (3)). Are the cases of borderline lying the cases of lying or not? Is wrongness instantiated or not in the cases of borderline lying? The answers to these questions depend on the worlds above. But should the cases of borderline lying be the cases of lying? Should wrongness be instantiated in the cases of borderline lying? The answers to these questions depend on the moral reality. What is the moral reality, then, out of these nine worlds? If one thinks that there is the moral reality, but we are just not aware of it or we just do not have the means to know the reality, she's an epistemicist (which is the topic of §3.4). However, if one defends metaphysical indeterminacy, there are many precisified worlds, and it is just indeterminate which one of these worlds correctly represent the reality.<sup>79</sup>

### *3.3.3 Metaphysical Indeterminacy in Metaethics*

So far, we have grasped some idea of what metaphysical indeterminacy is. Now let's find out what metaethicists have said about metaphysical indeterminacy. We want to know what metaethicists have to say about metaphysical indeterminacy because we are interested in finding out how metaethicists deal with indeterminacy, especially moral realists.

Even though there have been some attempts to explain metaphysical indeterminacy in metaethics, I want to focus on the works of three philosophers: Ralph Wedgwood, Ruth Chang, and Russ Shafer-Landau. The reason why I chose these three philosophers is that each of them has something unique to say about

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<sup>79</sup> My analysis of metaphysical indeterminacy is similar to Taylor and Burgess (2015)'s conclusion that given semantic indeterminacy, there is metaphysical indeterminacy which grounds semantic indeterminacy.

metaphysical indeterminacy in metaethics. Taking the notion of “better than” or “worse than” as primitive, Wedgwood claims that there is no metaphysical indeterminacy. Moral actions (as well as values or reasons) are always comparable to each other; either one of them is better or worse than the other, or they are tied. However, Chang disagrees. She thinks that two actions might be incommensurable. Shafer-Landau takes the middle ground: there are some cases that are metaphysically indeterminate, and there are some cases that are not metaphysically indeterminate. Let’s examine each in turn, especially focusing on Shafer-Landau’s account because his account is very relevant to the debate regarding moral realists and indeterminacy.

First, for Wedgwood (2018) fundamental ethical and normative notions (such as ‘good’ and ‘permissible’) are all essentially comparative (“*a* is better than *b*” and “There is more reason for *a* than for *b*.”). Consider “ $\phi$ -ing is permissible.” At first reading, the sentence does not involve any comparative notion. However, according to Wedgwood, “ $\phi$ -ing is permissible” is equivalent to “There is at least as much reason for  $\phi$ -ing as for any available alternative,  $\psi$ -ing.” In other words, it is not the case that there are more reasons to  $\psi$  than  $\phi$ .<sup>80</sup> I will come back to Wedgwood in detail in §3.4.1 because epistemicism would describe his position better. I mentioned Wedgwood here to contrast him with other metaethicists such as Chang and Shafer-Landau.

Second, for Chang (2002, 2016), not every ethical or normative notion can be reduced to comparative relations. Even though she thinks that there are three fundamental relations, “better than,” “worse than,” and “equal to,” there is the fourth relation, “on a par”. Other authors say that “on a par” relation represents semantic or metaphysical indeterminacy<sup>81</sup>, but Chang does not agree that “on a par” relation represents indeterminacy. In this thesis, Chang’s position is not considered because

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<sup>80</sup> The same reasoning applies not only to comparing reasons, but also to comparing the weights of reasons. Not all the weights of reasons need to be compared. The weights can be partially ordered and compared to each other (Wedgwood 2018).

<sup>81</sup> For example, see Broome (1997).

she has yet to give a clear argument on why “on a par” relation is different from metaphysical indeterminacy.

Lastly and importantly, Shafer-Landau’s (1994, 1995) work is one of the few that directly deals with the topic of my thesis: examining whether moral realism is compatible with metaphysical indeterminacy. While typical moral realists find metaphysical indeterminacy threatening to moral realism, Shafer-Landau (1995: 83) accepts metaphysical indeterminacy as a given feature of moral reality. Some extensions of moral properties are indeterminate, and moral sentences reflect such indeterminacy. In particular, moral reality reflects indeterminacy if moral reality is represented by noncomparative sentences in the form of “*a* is *F*”, rather than comparative sentences in the form of “*a* is *F-er* than *b*”. It seems to be that Shafer-Landau agrees with Wedgwood on this point that moral reality is determinate when represented by comparative sentences.<sup>82</sup>

Why does Shafer-Landau think that noncomparative moral reality is indeterminate? It is because, as I have explained in §3.3.1, a state of affairs consists of an object and a property in which we can easily identify object-indeterminacy and property-indeterminacy. Consider the moral reality represented by “Plato is pious.” Whereas it is relatively easy to pick out who Plato is, it might be indeterminate whether ‘being pious’ is instantiated or not. Whether ‘being pious’ is instantiated or not might depend on the sincerity of his religious belief, his virtuous deeds, his attitudes towards other believers, willingness to sacrifice, tolerance towards others whose religious practices differ from his own, or how much he makes an offering.

For the sake of the argument, let’s assume that ‘being sincere’ and ‘being tolerant’ exhaustively constitute ‘being pious.’ Plato is pious if and only if Plato is sincere and

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<sup>82</sup> The main difference between comparative cases and noncomparative cases lies in whether there is an overarching standard that can compare the two (or more) values. Comparative cases deal with whether *a* is more *F-er* than *b* when *a* and *b* are both morally *F*. In metaethics, this debate is known as ‘incommensurability of values.’ Statements regarding the incommensurability of values have a similar structure with vague statements: two items or values are incomparable or incommensurable if (1) it is neither determinately true nor determinately false that they are equally good and (2) neither determinately true nor determinately false that either is better or worse. For the helpful discussion whether incommensurability is vagueness, see Broome (1997) and Rabinowicz (2009).

tolerant. However, indeterminacy remains. How come? It is because it is indeterminate which criterion gets more weight.<sup>83</sup> Plato might be more sincere than tolerant. In contrast, Aristotle might be more tolerant than sincere. If only one person out of the two can be pious, who is pious? Either Plato is pious or Aristotle is pious, but it is indeterminate in whom the property instantiates.

Then would appealing to comparative notions help us figure out who is pious since Wedgewood and Shafer-Landau said that comparative notions are determinate? No. It is because even though it might be determinate that Aristotle is more tolerant than Plato, it is still indeterminate whether Aristotle is pious.<sup>84</sup> What is worse here is that comparative notions are not as determinate as Wedgewood and Shafer-Landau think they are. Let's change the situation a little bit. Plato is still more sincere than tolerant, and Aristotle is more tolerant than sincere. If only two people can be pious, then Plato is pious as well as Aristotle. Now, it is determinate that Plato and Aristotle are both pious, but it is indeterminate whether Plato is more pious than Aristotle (or vice versa). Therefore, indeterminacy still remains in both comparative and noncomparative notions in moral reality. No matter whether moral reality is comparative or noncomparative, multiple governing criteria give rise to indeterminacy.

### *3.3.4 Metaphysical Indeterminacy and Logic in Metaethics*

It is worth mentioning here the connection between logic and metaphysical indeterminacy in metaethics. Shafer-Landau rejects the principle of bivalence in order to explain how moral realism can be compatible with metaphysical

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<sup>83</sup> Shafer-Landau's own example is the following. A scientific theory appeals to a variety of explanatory virtues – simplicity, generality, testability, etc. There is no single overarching value to determine to which of these virtues is the best or can be reduced. There is no one method to combine these various dimensions of the criteria. Instead, what scientists do is to reason together and determine the best theory. Value monists seem to have the solution to this kind of indeterminacy because they endorse a single moral value (which might be 'good' or 'best') which is the most ethically fundamental of all, intrinsically valuable, from which every other moral value is derived. However, Shafer-Landau opposes to value monism in favour of value pluralism. For the discussion, see Shafer-Landau (1995).

<sup>84</sup> We can run the same reasoning process to figure out what constitute being tolerant and conclude that it is indeterminate whether 'being tolerant' is instantiated in Aristotle. It will result in infinite regress.

indeterminacy. In this section, I explain why I think his position is problematic. In chapter 2, I have argued that not only is it advantageous for moral realists to take classical logic to be the default logical system that they use, but also it is costly for realists to accept non-classical logic. Pointing out that his argument is problematic is important in this section because I will suggest a solution to Shafer-Landau's position in chapter 4, which does not require us to reject the main principles of classical logic.

According to Shafer-Landau, "If it is indeterminate whether some  $x$  is morally  $F$ , then neither of the following claims can be true: (i)  $x$  is  $F$ . (ii) It is false that  $x$  is  $F$ " (85). He also used the phrase "(i) and (ii) are untrue, though not false" (83). Let me rephrase what he is trying to say here. If something is morally indeterminate whether  $x$  is  $F$  (e.g. lying is wrong), then it is not true that whether  $x$  is  $F$  or  $x$  is not  $F$ . Pay attention to how he used the phrase, 'not true,' 'untrue,' and 'not false.' If both " $x$  is  $F$ " and " $x$  is not  $F$ " are not true and not false, then it means that the principle of bivalence, that every sentence expressing a proposition is either true or false, is rejected.

By rejecting the principle of bivalence, Shafer-Landau seems to reject the law of excluded middle (LEM) as well.<sup>85</sup> Rejecting the principle of bivalence, Shafer-Landau would surely say that if it is indeterminate that Plato is pious, then "Plato is pious" is neither true nor false. Then let's ask him whether  $p$  (Plato is pious) or not- $p$  (It is not the case that Plato is pious). According to LEM, either it is the case that Plato is pious, or it is not the case that Plato is pious. Since he thinks it is neither true nor false that Plato is pious, it also follows that it is neither  $p$  or not- $p$ . Then, following his own argument, Shafer-Landau must reject LEM, too.

But what's wrong with rejecting bivalence and LEM in order to explain metaphysical indeterminacy? Is it not the most intuitive explanation to metaphysical indeterminacy? If it is indeterminate whether  $x$  is  $F$ , then it sounds intuitive to say

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<sup>85</sup> I have explained how rejecting the principle of bivalence leads to rejecting the law of excluded middle in chapter 2.



that it is neither true nor false that  $x$  is  $F$ . While Shafer-Landau's rejection of bivalence and LEM seems plausible, I think the rejection of bivalence and LEM is problematic. Even though it sounds plausible to reject the principle of bivalence and LEM *just* for the noncomparative cases of moral sentences as Shafer-Landau suggests, there are some problems with his claim. The first problem is that, as I have explained in the last section, comparative cases are metaphysically indeterminate as well. To recap, given that " $x$  is pious if and only if  $x$  is sincere and tolerant", the truth-value of "Plato is more pious than Aristotle", namely a comparative sentence, is indeterminate when Plato is more sincere than tolerant, and Aristotle is more tolerance than sincere. Therefore, the problem of indeterminacy is not limited only to noncomparative cases.

Then should you reject the bivalence and LEM, which also follows that you are rejecting classical logic (since the principle of bivalence and LEM are necessary to classical logic, to comparative moral reality as well? Rejecting classical logic is a serious cost to moral realists. If LEM is to be rejected, moral realism starts to lose its intuitive force because it is not compatible with classical logic anymore. A moral realist should always want her view to be compatible with classical logic, as I have argued in chapter 2.<sup>86</sup> The serious cost of giving up on LEM is that some of our intuitive judgments regarding noncomparative and comparative moral matters become counterintuitive.

Let's first examine how unintuitive it is to give up LEM. For example, when I need to unlock the door of my house, it seems like the law of excluded middle tells me that the key is in my pocket or it is not the case that the key is in my pocket. This rule of logic assumes nothing metaphysical but reflects the barest way of reasoning: nothing is both in my pocket and not in my pocket. Since moral reality is as "precise as the realm of mathematics" (Wedgwood 2018), either  $p$  or not- $p$ . As I have argued in chapter 2, the LEM has a strong connection with the objective reality in the world because the reality is either the way it is or not the way it is (Dummett 2006: 48). If

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<sup>86</sup> According to Billy Dunaway (2016: 253), a typical moral realist will say that "There is no widespread indeterminacy in what "ought" and other normative terms refer to."

one denies LEM, then one needs to deny such an intuition that there is an objective moral reality.

One of the upshots of rejecting LEM is to decide which logic Shafer-Landau should instead accept. Although there are lots of logics that do not have LEM as a theorem, none of those logics would look attractive for moral realists to accept. Consider intuitionistic logic because it is one of the most familiar.<sup>87</sup> One of the problems of accepting intuitionistic logic is the failure of double negation elimination. Intuitionistic logic rejects double negation elimination, which is the rule that not-not-p entails p. Therefore, in intuitionistic logic, one cannot infer from "It is not the case that it is not the case that murder is wrong" to "murder is wrong" as a logical inference. Then it sounds even more counterintuitive than rejecting LEM. In sum, denying LEM comes with a cost. Moral realists would not want to pay the cost of giving up classical logic. In chapter 4, I suggest a solution to overcome this problem. In chapter 5, I explain how moral realists can use a version of moral realism that I suggest in chapter 4 to explain genuine moral disagreement.

### 3.4 Epistemic Indeterminacy

So far, we have covered semantic indeterminacy and metaphysical indeterminacy, the types of indeterminacy that originate externally from us, namely from language and world. Epistemic indeterminacy, on the other hand, is unique because epistemic indeterminacy is compatible with (or entailed by) semantic indeterminacy and metaphysical indeterminacy. Refer to the table below and see the column under 'semantic indeterminacy': because our language is not determinate,

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<sup>87</sup> Another familiar logic that does have the law of excluded middle as a theorem is K3. However, it is far more problematic than intuitionistic logic. It does have double negation elimination, but it doesn't have reductio or conditional proof as inference rules, and it has no theorems at all. Supervaluationism rejects Bivalence but accepts LEM. Supervaluationism requires rejection of inference rules such as contraposition, conditional proof and reductio ad absurdum. Would Shafer-Landau want these results? No. According to Dorothy Edgington (2010: 104), supervaluationism also rejects equivalence schema (e.g. it is true that x is red if and only if x is red): "It follows that either x is red but it's not true that x is red, or x is not red but it's not false that x is red. Again, suppose Bivalence is clearly false for borderline cases, and x is a clear borderline case. Then it is clearly not true that x is red, and clearly false that x is red. This seems wrong. 'x is red' should be a borderline case of truth, not a clear case of non-truth."

we do not know whether p. Epistemic indeterminacy follows from semantic indeterminacy. See the column under ‘metaphysical indeterminacy’: because the world is not determinate, we do not know whether p. Epistemic indeterminacy follows from metaphysical indeterminacy.

	<b>Epistemicism</b>	<b>Semantic Indeterminacy</b>	<b>Metaphysical Indeterminacy</b>
“World is determinate.”	Yes	Does not matter	No
“Language is determinate.”	Yes	No	Does not matter
“We do not know whether p.” (Epistemic Indeterminacy)	Yes	Yes	Yes

Epistemicism, however, is different from epistemic indeterminacy in such a way that epistemicism is not compatible with semantic indeterminacy or metaphysical indeterminacy. Epistemicism does not follow from semantic or metaphysical indeterminacy. Epistemicists find the cause of indeterminacy in us rather than the external world. The world is determinate. Our language might be determinate, too. However, due to our limited ability to know about the world, we are not in a position to know every detail about the world. Indeterminacy is nothing but our ignorance about the world. This is the epistemicist position.

Epistemicism is, arguably, the default position to hold if one is a moral realist. It is because epistemicism seems extremely compatible with moral realism at a first glance. There is no conflict between epistemicism and the tenets of moral realism that I have identified in chapter 2. Then why even bother mention epistemicism? It is because even though epistemicism is easily compatible with moral realism, it comes with a cost: under epistemicism, moral facts fail to be action-guiding.

I have two aims for this section. First is to explain what epistemicism is and why epistemicism is the most compatible with moral realism among the three. Second, I discuss the cost that comes with the position. In chapter 4, I provide some solutions to the cost.

### *3.4.1 Epistemicism*

What differentiates epistemicism from semantic indeterminacy or metaphysical indeterminacy is, as the name suggests, the cause of indeterminacy: our epistemic ability. What makes epistemicism unique from other positions is that our ignorance does not result from something else, such as world or language. Our ignorance results from our epistemic limitations.

Endorsing epistemicism, Timothy Williamson (1994: 195, 1995) thinks that “determinately” should be treated as equivalent to “knowably.” Indeterminate truth is simply unknowable truth. Epistemic indeterminacy is ignorance about a fully determinate, factual matter.<sup>88</sup> Here is an example. There is nothing indeterminate about the world. When people are lined up from tall to not tall, there are no borderline cases of being tall or not tall. Even if the difference between two people is 0.1 cm or 0.01 cm, it does not matter. If being tall starts from 170 cm, then a person who is 169.99 cm is not tall. She must be 170 cm in order to be tall. Even though we do not know from what centimetre people start being tall, it is determinate that there is a height where people start being tall.

Then according to epistemicism, “Hana is tall” must be either true or false. Not deviating from classical logic, epistemicism remains faithfully to the principle of bivalence: “In cases of unclarity, statements remain true or false, but speakers of the language have no way of knowing which” (Williamson 1994: 3). Even though there

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<sup>88</sup> Some might be happy to say that Williamson clearly says that language is determinate. According to Williamson, meaning is use. We have been using ‘tall’, for example, in a certain way over the years, but there is no possible way to track down the use in the past. Williamson (1994: 206) says, “Although meaning may supervene on use, there is no algorithm for calculating the former from the latter.” Since it is not possible to know how ‘tall’ has been used in the past, we do not know its application conditions.

is a clear cut-off point between a person who is tall and who is not tall, we just do not know how or where the predicate's extensions fall.<sup>89</sup> Why do we not know where the precise cut-off point lies? According to Williamson, we do not know whether "Hana is tall" because we cannot keep track of how 'tall' has been used through time. If the overall language usage pattern of 'tall' had been slightly shifted, the cut-off point of 'tall' would have changed.

Epistemicism is often met with incredulous stare because of its very unintuitive nature. It is unintuitive to think that there is a cut-off point for every vague predicate. However, I take epistemicism seriously in my thesis because

the epistemic view implies a form of realism, that even the truth about the boundaries of our concepts can outrun our capacity to know it. To deny the epistemic view of vagueness is therefore to impose limits on realism; to assert it is to endorse realism in a thoroughgoing form. (Williamson 1994: 4)

Epistemicism is, from the start, true to classical logic. This feature of epistemicism should be worth emphasizing because it is quite easy to find philosophers using non-classical logic to explain metaphysical indeterminacy or semantic indeterminacy. As I have argued that moral realists should, by default, accept classical logic, it is common that the realists find epistemicism the most appealing if they want to explain any kind of indeterminacy. The law of excluded middle and the law of bivalence are preserved for every moral sentence.

This is how moral realists would explain moral indeterminacy if they accept epistemicism. If there is predicate-indeterminacy, an epistemicist would say that a term definitely refers to a moral property, but we do not know and cannot know what that property is. If there is sentence-indeterminacy, an epistemicist would say that we do not know and cannot know what state of affairs the sentence represents. Soriticality never ends up in a paradox because there is a clear cut-off point. We just do not know and cannot know where the cut-off point is.

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<sup>89</sup> These are called 'blindspots', according to Sorensen (1988). Even if we had all the evidence about Hana's height and everyone else's height in the world, we cannot know where the cut-off point of 'tall' lies.

Wedgwood (2018) endorses such a view. He is “unpersuaded of the case that there is any such thing as moral vagueness” because there is always a sharp cut-off point in the moral soritical series. Taking all ethical notions to be fundamentally comparative, Wedgwood thinks that there is no vagueness or indeterminacy in “better than” or “worse than” relations. This is his analogy: let’s imagine ourselves holding different weights in our hands. We might not be able to tell which weight is heavier than the other if one (Mass 1) weighs 5 kg and the other (Mass 2) weighs 5.01 kg. However, there is no indeterminacy. Mass 1 is weightier than Mass 2.<sup>90</sup> We just cannot always know that Mass 1 is weightier than Mass 2 because of our limited powers of measurement. Just as comparing two weights are never vague, comparing ethical or normative concepts are never vague either. There is no indeterminacy in “ $\Phi$ -ing is better than  $\Psi$ -ing” or “Reason 1 is weightier than Reason 2”. We just do not know whether it is true or not because our epistemic ability to know all the details is limited.

### *3.4.2 Moral Epistemicism and its Cost*

Even though epistemicism is compatible with moral realism and the default position to hold if one is a moral realist, it comes with a cost: unknown moral facts cannot be action-guiding.<sup>91</sup> It is the conceptual truth that moral facts must be potentially action-guiding.<sup>92</sup> If moral facts are unknown, these moral facts cannot be action-guiding.<sup>93</sup> If you do not know what is right or wrong, how can you do something right or wrong? You cannot.

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<sup>90</sup> Wedgwood (2018) says, “If it is vague, it is only because of vagueness in the referring expressions ‘Mass 1’ and ‘Mass 2’, not because of any vagueness in the predicate ‘\_\_\_is weightier than\_\_\_’ or in the relation that the predicate stands for.”

<sup>91</sup> The common challenge that epistemicists face is that if moral realism accepts epistemicism, moral realism can easily fall into scepticism. It is because not only are some moral facts unknowable, but also we do not know how much of the moral facts are unknowable. Sorensen (1995), Oddie (2005), Constantinescu (2014), Dougherty (2014), and Schoenfield (2015) all point out the challenge. However, since I deal only with soritical cases, unknowable moral facts only exist in borderline cases. If we limit the unknowable moral facts to only borderline cases between knowable, definite moral facts, then epistemicism does not fall into skepticism.

<sup>92</sup> See B. Williams (1981), Jonathan Bennett (1998), and Judith Thomson (2008).

<sup>93</sup> Some argue that, from the assumption that unknown moral facts cannot be action-guiding, all moral facts must be knowable. It is because an important aspect of realism is that it is taken to be a position that the sentences that deal with an objective reality exist regardless of our ability to gain knowledge about it. In other words, in Realism, “the meaning of a declarative sentence consists in its possibly unrecognisable or verification-

Assume that picking up five pounds from the street is definitely permissible but picking up twenty pounds from the street is not permissible. Walking down the street, you see a twenty-pound note on the ground. Knowing that picking up a twenty-pound note is impermissible, you do not take it. Walking down the street again, you see a ten-pound note on the ground. Is it permissible to pick it up? According to epistemicism, there must be a number, e.g. the cut-off point, between five and twenty when it becomes impermissible to pick up, but you do not know and cannot know what the number is. Therefore, you do not and cannot know whether picking up a ten-pounds note is permissible. You fail to make any decision here because the unknown moral fact cannot guide your action in any way.

In ethics and metaethics, there have been attempts to explain how moral agents are able to do the right things when they are not sure what is the right thing to do. These moral agents are under moral uncertainty. Moral uncertainty is about how much credence or belief a moral agent has when deciding whether to  $\Phi$ .<sup>94</sup> For example, a moral agent under moral uncertainty hesitates to pick up the ten-pound note because she might be only 67% confident that picking up the ten-pound note is permissible. Since picking up a five-pound note is permissible and picking up a twenty-pound note is not permissible, she is 100% confident that picking up a five-pound note is permissible and 0% confident that picking up a twenty-pound note is not permissible. Then she could conclude that she is 67% confident that picking up a ten-pound note is permissible.

Can an epistemicist moral agent adopt such a decision-making process, relying on her credence? Of course; a moral agent under moral uncertainty can also be an

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transcendent truth condition" (Rasmussen and Ravnkilde 1982: 379). It is commonly assumed that it is implausible to think that there are unknowable ethical facts.

However, some moral facts are and can be unknowable. According to Shafer-Landau (2003), the fundamental moral principles are knowable a priori to epistemically ideal agents. If they are knowable, they are knowable a priori (Cuneo and Shafer-Landau, 2014). But we are not epistemically ideal agents. Therefore, some moral facts might not be knowable. Some moral facts might be unknowable because they are causally inefficacious, as Enoch (2011) claims. They are waiting to be discovered, just like any other scientific or mathematical facts. There is no need for all moral facts be knowable. That there are unknowable moral facts is also the consequence that Dougherty (2014: 361) drives from epistemic indeterminacy. Sorensen (1995) also argues that there are unknowable obligations.

<sup>94</sup> E. Harman (2015: 54) calls this position 'Uncertaintyism.'

epistemicist. Because she does not and cannot know whether picking up a ten-pound note is permissible, she might choose to rely on her credence. However, in my thesis, I am only interested in an epistemicist moral agent whose credence is not relevant to her. It is because a moral realist would not want to rely on her credence when there is an objective moral fact out there. Her credence might lead her astray to make a decision that is, in fact, morally wrong. I take the main difference between a moral agent under moral uncertainty and an epistemicist moral agent to be how much they let their credence affect the decision.<sup>95</sup>

Here is an example of an epistemicist moral agent who does not rely on her credence. Walking down the street, she hesitates to pick up the ten-pound note because she does not know whether picking up the ten-pound note is permissible. All she knows is that it is permissible to pick up a five-pound note and not permissible to pick up a twenty-pound note. Since she does not know where the cut-off point is, what should she do? Her credence is 67%, just as same as the moral agent under moral uncertainty, but she cannot rely on her credence. Her credence has nothing to do with the cut-off point because the cut-off point could be any amount between five and twenty. The chance of cut-off point being anywhere between five and twenty is evenly distributed. She does not and cannot know where the cut-off point lies, so she does not know what to do. The moral fact, which is unknown to her, fails to be action-guiding.

In chapter 4, I reply to the objection that under epistemicism, moral facts fail to be action-guiding. I will argue that unknown moral facts can still be action-guiding because epistemicist moral agents would choose to play safe, avoiding what is wrong as best as they can when they cannot know what is wrong.

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<sup>95</sup> Therefore, I am not engaging with Weatherson (2014), Lockhart (2000), Guerrero (2007), and Moller (2011) who all claim that an agent's moral credences are relevant to her decision-making.



#### **4. Compatibility between Moral Realism and Moral Indeterminacy**

To recap, in chapter 3, I have posited three problems. First, moral terms exhibit semantic indeterminacy. Even though moral realists would want to explain how moral terms refer to the objective moral reality, oftentimes moral terms exhibit multidimensional vagueness. When moral terms are multidimensionally vague, their meanings are indeterminate in two ways: it is indeterminate which criteria (extension) apply to a term; it is indeterminate whether the object to which the term refers (intension) is the (or a) correct referent of the term. To solve such a problem, in §4.1, I provide the semantics for multidimensionally vague moral terms. With such semantics, I show that moral realists could endorse semantic indeterminacy in a way that is not harmful to moral realism. Providing semantics for multidimensionally vague moral terms will be helpful to explain why people disagree. It would especially explain moral disagreement, when people fail to communicate moral concepts to each other (which will be the topic of chapter 5).

Second, metaphysical indeterminacy is prevalent in both comparative and noncomparative states of affairs in ethics. Shafer-landau explains metaphysical indeterminacy by rejecting one of the principles of classical logic. In contrast, I argue that the version of moral realism that I proposed in chapter 2 is not compatible with Shafer-landau's explanation. It is because moral realists would not want to pay the cost of rejecting the principle of bivalence or the law of excluded middle. The version of metaphysical indeterminacy that I provide in §4.2 will be compatible with moral realism as well as classical logic.

Third, even though epistemicism is compatible with the version of moral realism I proposed in chapter 2, I show that accepting epistemicism comes with a cost. While moral facts should be action-guiding, unknown moral facts are not action-guiding. Even though there is an option for moral agents to rely on their credence when faced with moral uncertainty, it is not an option for epistemicists because relying on their credence might be morally risky to do something wrong. In §4.3, I will argue that unknown moral facts can be action-guiding.

After I argue that semantic indeterminacy, metaphysical indeterminacy, and epistemicism are all compatible with moral realism, I will show that moral realism will gain more explanatory power than anti-realism in explaining moral indeterminacy. With my suggestions in chapter 4, moral realists will be able to clarify why moral disagreement is prevalent and explain why moral disagreement does not have to be always resolved through convergence or through discovering an objective moral truth.

#### **4.1 Compatibility Between Semantic Indeterminacy and Moral Realism**

In this section, I argue that moral realists can explain semantic indeterminacy by providing the semantics for multidimensionally vague moral terms. First, I introduce Diana Raffman's (2014) multi-range theory of vagueness. Second, I argue that her semantics can be used to explain multidimensionally vague or indeterminate moral terms. Third, I reply to some possible objections.

##### *4.1.1 Multi-Range Theory of Vagueness and Semantic Indeterminacy*

In §3.2, I showed that, because most moral terms are multidimensionally vague, it is difficult for the moral realists to explain such vagueness. It is never clear what a moral sentence means because a name could be indeterminate; a predicate could be indeterminate, or a sentence could be indeterminate. In this section, I argue that the multi-range theory of vagueness, suggested by Diana Raffman (2014), could be helpful for the moral realists to explain semantic indeterminacy.<sup>96</sup> I will first explain the multi-range theory of vagueness and apply the theory to moral terms, providing the semantics for multidimensionally vague moral terms.

First, let me introduce what Raffman's multi-range theory of vagueness is, which is inspired by Kaplan's theory of indexicals. Raffman thinks that the vague terms

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<sup>96</sup> I am on the same page with a fully naturalized robust moral realist, Richard Boyd (1988), who also takes indeterminacy to be compatible with moral realism because a definition of a moral term would necessarily be semantically indeterminate.

behave just like indexicals, such as ‘I’, ‘here’, and ‘now’. So how do indexicals work? Indexicals have two different senses: character and context. The character of first-person indexical, ‘I’, refers to the speaker (Kaplan 1989: 505). If both Hana and Ken say, “I am sleepy”, these utterances have the same character: ‘I’ refers the speaker of the sentence “I am sleepy”. However, the contents expressed by the sentence are different because of the difference in context. A context consists of an agent (namely, the speaker), a time, and a location in a possible world. Therefore, in Hana’s utterance, ‘I’ refers to this speaker, Hana, whereas in Ken’s utterance, ‘I’ refers to that speaker, Ken. By introducing the difference between character and context, Kaplan was able to explain how indexicals uniquely behave: indexicals appear to have same meaning (i.e. ‘I’ refers to the speaker) while they appear to have different meanings, too (i.e. In one context, ‘I’ refers to Hana; in the other, to Ken).

Whereas Kaplan thinks that non-indexicals terms, especially vague terms such as ‘blue’ or ‘rich’, do not behave like indexicals (Kaplan 1989: 506), Raffman disagrees. According to Raffman, vague terms have *quasi-character* just like indexicals have character: “the quasi-character of a vague predicate is a context-invariant element of the word’s content: It is that element of content that is common to all contents of the predicate” (Raffman 2014: 78). Just like the character of ‘I’ is the speaker, which remains unchanged throughout different contexts, the quasi-character of ‘tall’ is ‘large in height’. It is because whether the tall object is a building, tree, basketball player, or kindergartener, the character of ‘being tall’ always remains the same: ‘large in height’. Likewise, the quasi-character of ‘old’ is ‘aged’. No matter what the old thing is (a person, apple, painting, fossil), the character of ‘old’ remains the same: ‘aged’.<sup>97</sup> Raffman calls this context-invariant element of meaning the *stable content* of a predicate.

After the stable content is fixed, different contexts are applied to a vague term, just like indexicals. Raffman calls such a context *V-index*. Similar to the context of an indexical, the V-index of a vague term consists of “a respect (dimension, activity)

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<sup>97</sup> Even though the definition seems circular, Raffman thinks that “if there is any circularity in our account of the quasi-character of a vague word, it is no worse than the kind of circularity we find in the dictionary” (2014: 78).

$r$ , an opposed or contrastive category  $c$ , and a comparison class  $cc$  that is usually defined in part by time, place, and world” (81).<sup>98</sup> Now let’s put this V-index into practice. One V-index for ‘old’ could be {human’s age; UK median age; UK life expectancy for women, 2017,  $W@$ }. What it means is this V-index operates on the stable content, ‘aged’ (the quasi-character of ‘old’), with respect to human’s age, in contrast to the median age of UK population, compared to the UK life expectancy for women in 2017 at the actual world:

{human’s age; median age in the UK; life expectancy for British women, 2017,  $W@$ }

Not old		Borderline old	Old
↑ o	40 (median age) ↑	61 (mean value) ↑	82 (Life expectancy) ↑

Another V-index for ‘old’ could be {age; NFL prodigy; NFL sports players, 2006,  $W@$ }. This context operates on the stable content, ‘aged’ (quasi-character of ‘old’) again, with respect to age, in contrast to the age of youngest children sports prodigy, compared to the average age of NFL players in 2000 in this actual world.<sup>99</sup>

Now we will be able to see why Raffman’s theory of vagueness is called ‘multiple-range’ theory. It is because the context of a vague predicate, a V-index, determines multiple ranges of application of the vague predicate. Going back to the first V-index of ‘old’, let’s see how there can be many ranges of application of ‘old’.

V-index can also change to a different context. Following the second V-index above, ‘old’ is relativized to the age of NFL players. Let’s say that an NFL prodigy starts playing American football at age 15; 25 is the average age of NFL players; 40 is old if one’s a professional football player. Assume that the sorites series here runs

<sup>98</sup> V-index is settled by speaker intention as Fodor and Lepore (2004: 8) said: “Nothing about the context of an utterance is a metaphysical determinant of its content. The only metaphysical determinants of utterance content are (i) the linguistic structure of the utterance (the syntax and lexical inventory of the expression type that it’s a token of), and (ii) the communicative intentions of the speaker. Nothing else. Ever.”

<sup>99</sup> One can come up with more examples. Another V-index for ‘old’ could be: {year of construction; 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings; churches from the Middle Ages, 1850,  $W^*$ }. This context operates on the stable content, ‘aged’ (which is the quasi-character of ‘old’), with respect to year of construction, in contrast to the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, compared to the churches from the Middle Ages in 1950 at a possible world where industrial revolution did not happen.

from 40 to 15. Then a 27.5-years-old football player is borderline old. Therefore, a competent language user can classify the age from 40 to 30 as old, 40 to 29 as old, or 40 to 28 as old. There are multiple ranges of application, and any of these applications of 'old' are permissible, as long as the age of the language user does not go lower than the borderline old.

As the examples show above, there are multiple permissible extensions of a vague predicate. Raffman concludes as the following: "the upshot is that a vague predicate does not have a (single) extension in the usual sense" (98). Rather, there are many extensions to a vague term, which are all permissible.<sup>100</sup>

#### *4.1.2 Multi-Range Theory of Vagueness Applied to Moral Semantic Indeterminacy*

In this section, I show how moral realists can explain moral semantic indeterminacy, based on Raffman's multi-range theory of vagueness. My goal in this section is to argue that Raffman's multi-range theory of vagueness is a useful tool for moral realists to explain semantic indeterminacy.

Moral realists have reasons to welcome her theory of vagueness to explain semantic indeterminacy. First, her theory is compatible with classical logic. Vague words lack sharp boundaries of application, but none of the principles of classical logic is violated. The sentences that contain vague predicate are either true or false because the truth of a sentence is determined as the following: "a sentence containing a vague predicate is true relative to each range of application that contains the value instantiated by the item to which the predicate is being applied", according to Raffman (133).

Second, even though the truth is relative to each range of application, it does not mean that vague predicates are response-dependent (169). What determines the range of application is the semantics of the predicate, namely its ranges of

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<sup>100</sup> It is reasonable to object to her theory by saying that stopping at 61 (or 27.5) is too arbitrary. In response to such arbitrariness, I provide an answer in chapter 5.

application relative to the V-index and the stable content, not the responses or judgments of competent speakers. Third, her theory is compatible with truthmaker theory. Moral truths are made true in virtue of truthmakers. In her theory, truthmaker is a set of values to which a term can competently be applied. A set of value represents the multiple permissible ways of applying a vague word (133).

Let's apply her theory to morally vague terms which exhibit multidimensional vagueness.<sup>101</sup> We saw earlier in §3.1, that an evaluative term 'courageous' is multidimensionally vague because there are many ways to define it. There are two levels of semantic indeterminacy here. First, it is indeterminate which dimensions of 'courageous' are decisive ones. Second, even if the dimensions are set, it is indeterminate whether the dimension applies to the extension of the term. To simplify the case, suppose that the stable content of 'courageous' is 'bold' and that two dimensions of facing danger and taking risk bravely are at issue. Then 'courageous' is applied relative to two V-indices, for example {facing danger; bystander; police officers, 20<sup>th</sup> century,  $W_{DC}$ } and {taking risk bravely; bystanders, police officers; 20<sup>th</sup> century;  $W_{DC}$ }. In the first branch of V-index, the sorites series is constructed from the bystanders who would not face danger and people who would always face danger. In the second branch of V-index, the sorites series is constructed from the bystanders who would not take risk bravely to people who would always take risk bravely. Here is the spectrum diagram below. The dotted vertical line is drawn to show that there is no sharp boundary:

1) {facing danger; bystanders; police officers, 20<sup>th</sup> century,  $W_{DC}$ }

Never face danger	Sometimes face danger	Regularly face danger	Always face danger
↑ Bystanders	Police Officers ↑		

<sup>101</sup> Refer to Raffman (2014: 118) for the discussion of multidimensional word, 'big'.

2) {taking risk bravely; bystanders; police officers, 20<sup>th</sup> century; W<sub>DC</sub>}

Never take risk bravely	Sometimes take risk bravely	Regularly take risk bravely	Always take risk bravely
↑ Bystanders	Police Officers ↑		

In both branches, police officers are the ones who usually take risk bravely and face danger. It is permissible for a competent language speaker to apply ‘courageous’ to a range of spectrum between the people who always face danger and take risk bravely and people who are borderline courageous – they sometimes face danger and take risk bravely (See Figure 6).

Never face danger	Sometimes face danger	Regularly face danger	Always face danger
Never take risk bravely	Sometimes take risk bravely	Regularly take risk bravely	Always take risk bravely

Figure 6. The shaded area is where it is permissible for a competent language speaker to apply ‘courageous’.

Given the stable content and the two V-indices, we can analyse what V-index-relative content of the following utterance, “Superman is courageous”: “Superman is bold in both facing danger and taking risk bravely, as opposed to bystanders, compared to police officers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the world of DC comics.” Then at the world of DC comics, if Superman belongs to the extensions of both V-indices where Superman is more courageous than average policemen, then “Superman is courageous” is true relative to the pairs in both extensions.<sup>102</sup>

1) {facing danger; bystander; police officers, 20<sup>th</sup> century, W<sub>DC</sub>}

Never face danger	Sometimes face danger	Regularly face danger	Always face danger
↑ Bystanders	Police Officers ↑		↑ <b>Superman</b>

<sup>102</sup> This analysis is similar to Tom Dougherty (2014: 371)’s conclusion that none of the extensions would stand out with a special ethical glow. Rather, there is a multiplicity of ethically relevant extensions.

2) {taking risk bravely; bystanders; police officers, 20<sup>th</sup> century; W<sub>DC</sub>}

Never take risks bravely	Sometimes take risks bravely	Regularly take risks bravely	Always take risks bravely
↑ Bystanders	Police Officers ↑		↑ <b>Superman</b>

This example is relatively easy. As more dimensions are added, it becomes more difficult to evaluate the truth of a sentence that contains multidimensional moral predicate.

Consider another example, ‘morally responsible’, which is another multidimensional term that I introduced in §3.2.4. Again, there are two levels of semantic indeterminacy. It is indeterminate which dimensions of ‘morally responsible’ are decisive ones. There are at least five criteria: (a) rationality, (b) self-governance, (c) capacity to act on the basis of moral considerations, (d) being worthy of receiving a certain kind of reactive attitudes like praise and blame, and (e) causal connection between the action and its consequence for which the person is responsible. It means that a sentence which includes ‘morally responsible’ has at least five V-indices. The second level of indeterminacy occurs when, even if the criteria are set, it is indeterminate whether each of the criteria applies to the extension of the term. Suppose that the stable content of ‘morally responsible’ is ‘acting in accordance with one’s moral obligations’ and five dimensions are at issue. ‘Morally responsible’ is applied relative to five V-indices. An example of the first V-index would be: {rational; people who do not consider relevant reasons for action; average people, 2018, W<sub>@</sub>}. The sorites is constructed from the least rational people who consider irrelevant reasons for action to most rational people who consider the most relevant reasons for action. A borderline rational person would be a person who considers some relevant reasons for action. With this V-index, it is permissible for a competent language speaker to apply ‘morally responsible’ to a range of spectrum between the people who consider most relevant reasons for action (those who are most rational) to people who consider some relevant reasons for action (those who



are borderline rational). If somebody utters “Sophie is morally responsible” only with this V-index in mind, the content is the following: “Sophie rationally acts in accordance with her morally obligatory reasons, in contrast with the people who consider irrelevant reasons, compared to the average people in 2018 at this actual world.” Then at this world, in 2018, if Sophie belongs to the extension of this V-index where Sophie is as rational as the average people or more rational than the average people, then “Sophie is morally responsible” is true. As more V-indices are added, it will be more difficult to evaluate the truth-value of the sentence. If Sophie belongs to the extension of every V-index that’s added, then the sentence becomes true.<sup>103</sup> Moral realism is compatible with this account because the utterance is either true or false. It obeys the law of bivalence. There is the fact of the matter that Sophie belongs somewhere in these extensions. There is a moral fact in the world: Sophie is the truthmaker for this utterance. Still, there is semantic indeterminacy because it is permissible for a competent language speaker to refer to multiple extensions of V-index. However, since they are all permissible application of the term, such semantic indeterminacy is harmless.

Now that the semantics for the multidimensional moral terms is given, which is compatible with moral realism, what are the upshots? First, contextualism no longer appears to be all hostile towards moral realism: context serves a role in classifying a V-index. While context, by itself, cannot provide truth-values for utterances for realists, context provides the elements in V-index. These elements are the milestones for realists to locate where the truthmaker lies. Second, by separating the stable content from the V-index, realists can now explain why it is possible for people to use moral terms differently from one another but refer to the same property: the stable content of the term stays the same, yet their V-indices could differ.<sup>104</sup> Third,

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<sup>103</sup> The rest of the V-indices can be constructed with different comparison groups, time, and world. An example of the second criterion of “morally responsible” would be: {self-governed; children; average school kid; 1900; W@}. Third: {capacity to act on the basis of moral considerations; infants; kindergarteners; 2000; W@}. Fourth: {being worthy of receiving a certain kind of reactive attitudes; simple calculators; advanced AI; 2500; W<sub>Starwars</sub>}. And keep going.

<sup>104</sup> Similarly, David Manley (Work in progress), for example, argues that moral realists can accept the semantic plasticity of moral expressions. See <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1016/d1034b074fe637db653dad3be63a4e9d57bb.pdf>

the multi-range theory of vagueness applied to moral terms will be able to contribute to the Moral Twin Earth debate which Horgan and Timmons (1991) triggered and in which Dunaway and McPherson (2016) are currently engaged.<sup>105</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Objections to Multi-range Theory of Vagueness

These could be some objections to the multi-range view. First, if we need five or more V-indices to figure out the content of a simple utterance such as ‘morally responsible’, what are we exactly communicating with each other? Second, not only are V-indices always implicated so it is difficult to find out exactly which V-indices are implied, but also we are not even sure if we can exhaustively figure out what these V-indices are. Third, is it ever possible to figure out the final truth-value of a sentence that includes a multidimensional moral term?

My reply is the following. Regarding the first question, this objection runs parallel with the discussion in philosophy of language, regarding the difference between what is said and what is meant. Right now, I am interested in figuring out what is meant. In chapter 5, when I talk about moral disagreement, I will tackle what is communicated. The answer to the question “what is meant?” can be given by providing the stable content and the V-index (or V-indices) of a term.

Regarding the second question, I have two replies. First, V-indices do not always have to be explicitly shown. Here’s a sentence, “Huckleberry Finn in courageous”, uttered by a reader of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Even though every relevant V-index is not explicitly shown, the setting is already given: Huckleberry Finn freed the slave, Jim, in the mid-19th century, Missouri. Consider another sentence, “Mother Teresa was compassionate.” Again, even though every relevant V-index is not explicitly shown, the setting is already known: Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic nun who lived in the 20th century, was more caring and sympathetic

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<sup>105</sup> I would like to engage in this debate in my next project, not in this dissertation.

than the average people. It is, quite often, not difficult to figure out the V-indices of the utterance.

Second, moral language is complicated. Many moral terms are multidimensional. Many moral terms are open-texture. Some even might be both. Therefore, in the end, it might not be possible to exhaustively find out all the V-indices for a moral term. However, it does not mean that we are not making any progress. If a term is open-texture, we will be able to figure out relevant criteria in the future. It is inevitable that we cannot have answers to all the moral questions now: Is it morally blameworthy if a monogamous couple has sex with a robot? Is it morally permissible to eat lab-grown meat? Is it morally wrong to genetically engineer our children's genome? Hopefully, our future generation will better gather morally relevant information to these questions which we cannot consider right now. If a term is multidimensional, we can restrict our range of discussion since it is difficult to exhaust the list of relevant criteria. Consider the term 'morally responsible' again. We can fix the discussion about who is 'morally responsible' in terms of 'being worthy of receiving reactive attitudes.' It would be out of context if one brings in another V-index for the term.

Regarding the third question, it is not the moral realists' job to figure out the objectively fixed truth-value of a moral sentence. As long as moral realists provide the semantics for the terms in question, which is compatible with the tenets of moral realism, their primary job is done. Sometimes, it takes a long time to figure out moral truths. Today, "Slavery is wrong", "women are not inferior to men", "human rights are for everyone" are obvious moral truths. However, these truths were not obvious in the past. There will be moral truths that will sound obvious to our future generation but not to us right now. It is possible to figure out the final truth-value of a sentence that includes a multidimensional moral term, but it might take a long time. I will explain more on this point in chapter 5 in relation to open-texture.

## 4.2 Compatibility Between Metaphysical Indeterminacy and Moral Realism

In this section, I argue that moral realists can explain metaphysical indeterminacy not only without falling prey to the problem of creeping minimalism but also without giving up on classical logic. First, I introduce Elizabeth Barnes's (2010) model of metaphysical indeterminacy. Second, I will then argue that her model is compatible with the tenets of moral realism without violating the principle of bivalence and LEM. Third, I provide replies to some objections.

### 4.2.1 Metaphysical Indeterminacy and Ontic Vagueness

Barnes suggests metaphysical indeterminacy as the following. Barnes (2010: 605) invites us to imagine a counterfactual scenario where the predicate 'is bald' has come to mean 'having less than less than 846 hair.' Daniel has 846 hair very firmly attached to his scalp, while one hair is teetering on the brink, about to be dropped. Is Daniel bald? Even with the precisification, there seems to be no fact of the matter whether Daniel is definitely bald. Ontic vagueness is that, according to Barnes, even if the truthmakers for the given sentence are determined, indeterminacy still remains.<sup>106</sup> When *p* is ontically indeterminate, according to Barnes (2010: 611),

there is not some special state of affairs – the state of affairs of *p*'s being indeterminate – which obtains. Rather, there are two possible states of affairs – the state of affairs of things being such that *p* and the state of affairs of things being such that not-*p* – and it's simply indeterminate which of these two states of affairs in fact obtains.

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<sup>106</sup> Barnes (2010) uses truthmakers to characterize ontic indeterminacy. Even though Barnes uses truthmakers instrumentally in her characterization of ontic indeterminacy, she does not commit to one specific truthmaker theory. It is ontologically neutral what one takes these truthmakers to be. Therefore, I take it that it not only is compatible with my characterization of moral realism, but also provides a fitting explanation of metaphysical indeterminacy in morality. The difference between Shafer-Landau and Barnes is that while Barnes takes possible worlds to be truthmakers, Shafer-Landau rejects the talk of truthmakers. Shafer-Landau does not characterize realism with truthmakers. Shafer-Landau (2003) writes, "If some standard is true, irreducible, and to be construed realistically, then nothing *makes* it true; its truth is not a creation, but instead a brute fact about the way the world works" (48). Therefore, I take Barnes's possible worlds can be the truthmakers for moral truths in moral realism.

It is because it can be indeterminate whether that particular truthmaker (or a member of a set of truthmakers), in fact, obtains. I reformulate her ontic vagueness as:

(Ontic Vagueness)  $p$  is ontically vague when  $x$  makes  $p$  true, but it is indeterminate whether  $x$  exists at  $w$ . Whether what it takes to make  $p$  true obtains remains unsettled while what it takes to make  $p$  true is settled.

Barnes takes precisifications to be many different possible worlds. Her proposal is that there is a difference between an actual world and an actualized world. There is an *actual* world, which is a mereological sum of concrete objects. There is also an *actualized* world – the abstract world that represents things as being as they are. According to Barnes’s possible world theory, every possible world is fully precise as they are actual. Ontic indeterminacy is such that it is indeterminate which of the possible worlds is actualized: “It is indeterminate which world, out of the many worlds that represent things to be a precise way, is the one that represents the way the actual world is” (613).

To simplify the matter, let’s say that  $W$  is supposed to be an actualized world, and there are only two actual worlds  $p$  or  $p^*$  which could be  $W$  or not.  $W$  is ontically indeterminate as it’s indeterminate which of these two states of affairs in fact obtains. There is no midway. It is determinate whether  $W$  holds for  $p$  or not  $p$ , so LEM applies. However, indeterminacy leaves the world unsettled. Therefore, it should be the case that  $\nabla p$  or  $\nabla(p^*)$  for  $W$ , where  $\nabla$  is an operator for indeterminacy. This point is similar to Shafer-Landau’s point as well. Even if a constitutive criterion for a property  $F$  is precisified to be A or B, it is indeterminate whether a criterion A or B holds for  $F$ .

#### 4.2.2 Metaphysical Indeterminacy and Moral Realism

Barnes’s model is advantageous for moral realists because adopting her account of metaphysical indeterminacy allows moral realist to avoid the cost of rejecting the principle of bivalence and LEM. She claims that the principle of bivalence holds for an interpretation of metaphysical indeterminacy: it will be the case that it is

determinate that either  $p$  is true or  $p$  is false:  $\Delta (Tp \vee Fp)$ , where  $\Delta$  is an operator for determinacy. In the actual words, it is determinately the case that  $p$  is either true or false. What is indeterminate is which truth-value  $p$  has. Even though it's determinately the case that  $p$  is either true or false, it is indeterminate that either  $p$  is true or  $p$  is false:  $\nabla(Tp)$  and  $\nabla(Fp)$ . Therefore, the principle of bivalence holds.

Similarly, LEM holds in her model. According to Barnes (2010: 611), "There are only two ways the world could go, a  $p$  way and a not- $p$  way; it's just that the world has left it unsettled which of these ways is in fact the case." It is determinate that either  $p$  or not- $p$ :  $\Delta (p \vee \sim p)$ , but it is indeterminate which one of the worlds is, in fact, the actualized world.  $p$  and not- $p$  are two possible states of affairs, but it is unsettled which state of affair, in fact, obtains:  $\nabla p$  and  $\nabla(\sim p)$ . Therefore, LEM holds.

Now, let's apply her model to metaphysical indeterminacy in moral realism. First, to simplify the matter, let's assume that there are only two precisified worlds,  $w$  and  $w^*$ . There is a possible world  $w$  where a moral property *wrongness* is instantiated when you pick up a twenty-pound note on the ground. In  $w^*$ , *wrongness* is not instantiated when you pick up a twenty-pound note on the ground. Even though there is only one determinately actualized world,  $w$  and  $w^*$  disagree over which world is actualized:  $w$  says " $w$  is actualized.  $w^*$  is not." whereas  $w^*$  says " $w^*$  is actualized.  $w$  is not." In Barnes's words, "it's simply indeterminate which of these two states of affairs in fact obtains" (ibid).

Moral indeterminacy becomes complicated when more criteria are added. Going back to the example of Plato being pious, let's say that a property *piousness* has only two criteria: being faithful to the theological doctrines and dedicated to following the religious rules. Then relying on the formula for the number of possible cases ( $2^n$  where  $n=2$ ), there are four actual worlds:  $w_1$ (Plato is faithful and dedicated),  $w_2$ (Plato is faithful and not dedicated),  $w_3$ (Plato is not faithful but dedicated), and  $w_4$ (Plato is not faithful nor dedicated). It is indeterminate not only whether, in  $w_2$  and  $w_3$ , Plato can be considered as being pious, but also which one of these actual worlds is the actualized one. If a property has three criteria, then there are eight ( $2^3$ )

possible worlds; four criteria, then sixteen ( $2^4$ ). We can say that the world where all of these criteria meet is determinately *F* and the world where all of these criteria do not meet is determinately not *F*. We get a new formula for the number of indeterminate possible worlds:  $2^n - 2$ . However, it is still indeterminate which one of these actual worlds is *actualized*.

To recap, adopting Barnes's model, moral realists can now explain metaphysical indeterminacy without violating any rules of classical logic. These mind-independent possible worlds can be the source of truth conditions for some moral sentences, the truth-values of which are sometimes indeterminate. With this model, moral realists will not have trouble talking about the indeterminate truth-values of moral sentences which correspond to these possible worlds, without violating bivalence and LEM.

#### *4.2.3 Objection to Realists' Take on Metaphysical Indeterminacy*

One of the well-known objections to realists' take on metaphysical indeterminacy is from Constantinescu (2014). His main point is to question how a fixed moral property supervenes on different clusters of natural or non-natural vague properties, depending on contextual varieties. He draws the conclusion that moral realism is false by arguing that moral realism is incompatible with metaphysical indeterminacy. He especially argues against Robust Moral Realism, particularly having Shafer-Landau in mind. In this section, I provide replies to Constantinescu's objection.

According to Constantinescu (2014), moral realism endorses a tenet on supervenience: moral facts and properties supervene upon natural or non-natural facts and properties. Because moral facts and properties supervene upon natural (or non-natural) facts and properties, a moral property, 'being permissible', would supervene on natural facts about the speaker's linguistic conventions and attitudes. 'Permissibility' is a non-natural property, a property supervening on clusters of natural tropes, just like clusters of clouds rather than a set with a clear boundary. Then a cluster of natural tropes  $N_i$  constitutes a moral trope  $P_i$ . Whenever  $N_i$  is

present,  $P_i$  is present. However, since tropes are clusters just like clouds,  $N_i$  would always change depending on the contextual variation (Ridge 2007a). It means that the same moral trope can be instantiated by different natural tropes in different contexts.

The same argument could also be applied to a cluster of non-naturalistic tropes as well. If a cluster of non-natural tropes  $NN_i$  constitutes a moral trope  $P_i$ , then whenever  $NN_i$  is present,  $P_i$  is present too.<sup>107</sup> Here the problem is similar. Depending on the context,  $P_i$  can be instantiated by a cluster  $NN_1$  through  $NN_{10}$ , a cluster  $NN_2$  through  $NN_{10}$ , or a cluster through  $NN_3$  through  $NN_{10}$ , and so on. What exactly is  $P_i$ , if the same moral trope can be sometimes instantiated by  $NN_1$  and sometimes not?<sup>108</sup> The diversity of properties falling under one and the same moral predicate seems almost boundless and even gerrymandered (Constantinescu 2014: 167).

Constantinescu argues that vague moral properties turning out to be coextensive with disjunctions of properties in different contexts is problematic for moral realism. It is because robust moral realists think that moral facts and properties are mind-independent and metaphysically *sui generis*. If a moral property can be instantiated by many disjunctions of clusters of natural or non-natural properties depending on different contexts, it appears to be mind-dependent and not metaphysically *sui generis*.

I argue against Constantinescu with three points. First, as I have mentioned contextualism in §3.2.1, there is no need for moral realists to ignore contexts all the time. Context is part of moral reality. Context is useful for determining the reference of vague moral terms. It is just that moral realists cannot rely solely on contexts all the time. Just as Raffman's multi-range theory of vagueness shows, context first helps us set a boundary, namely a V-index, of a term.

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<sup>107</sup> An example of a non-naturalistic property would be an aesthetic property or a legal property.

<sup>108</sup> In Enoch's terms, general supervenience would hold, but specific supervenience (that a moral property would only supervene on specific natural properties) would be violated.



Second, I think Constantinescu confuses semantic indeterminacy with metaphysical indeterminacy. According to my classification, semantic indeterminacy involves indeterminacy of criteria and indeterminacy of reference; metaphysical indeterminacy involves whether a property is instantiated or not (or whether a world is actualized or not) when certain criteria are given. Constantinescu's description of indeterminacy belongs to semantic indeterminacy, not metaphysical indeterminacy because he is concerned with whether a moral property is constituted by other properties, namely other criteria, just as I described in §3.2.2. Therefore, his complaints can be resolved by providing the semantics of a vague term.

Lastly, as I have argued in §4.2.2, one of the ways to reply to such an objection is to adopt Barnes's (2010) account of ontic vagueness. There are many possible worlds in which a moral property is instantiated by these different combinations of natural or non-natural tropes. These numerous possible worlds are all actual. They are equally important, just as Dougherty (2014: 365) says, "there are multiple extensions that form important metaphysical categories, although each extension is equally important from a metaphysical point of view". All of these worlds count. What is indeterminate is that whether which one of the actual worlds is *actualized*.

#### **4.3 Making Moral Decisions under Epistemicism**

In §3.4, I showed that epistemicism, applied to moral matters, is about not knowing whether there is a moral fact in the world that  $\Phi$ -ing is wrong (or right, permissible, etc.).<sup>109</sup> I have also shown that, under epistemicism, unknown moral facts would fail to be action-guiding, and epistemicists cannot rely on their credence.

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<sup>109</sup> We can draw the parallel between epistemicism and actualism that E. Harman suggests. Actualism is, in Harman's (2015: 59) words, when "a person's moral beliefs and moral credences are usually irrelevant to how she (subjectively) should act. [...] What makes it the case, according to Actualism, that Barbara should refrain from shooting is simply that she'd be taking a risk of killing someone, not that she'd be doing something that she knows is taking a risk of doing something objectively morally wrong—though that is also true in this case."

In this section, I argue unknown moral facts can still be action-guiding. I suggest a way for epistemicists to make decisions which would be not running any risk morally.

First, I want to limit the moral cases that a moral agent faces to the sorites cases. Sorites cases run from a moral situation that is definitely permissible to a situation that is definitely not permissible. The beginning and the end of the sorites series is also known to the agent. What she does not know is where the cut-off point lies in this series. In this situation, what should she do?

Let's go back to the example that I have constructed in §3.4. You are walking down the street, and you see a ten-pound note. Assume that it is definitely permissible to pick up a five-pound note off the ground, and it is definitely impermissible to pick up a twenty-pound note off the ground. The agent knows this. What should she do when she sees a ten-pound note? If one is an epistemicist moral agent, I think that the decision she should make is not picking up the ten-pound note because there is no risk of doing something morally wrong. Even though her credence might motivate her to pick up the ten-pound note, an epistemicist moral agent would not want to risk anything morally. She would want to avoid doing something morally wrong all the time because she does not know where the cut-off point lies.

It is important to analyse the reasoning process that an epistemicist moral agent goes through here. At first, an epistemicist making such a conservative decision appears to be unreasonable. It is because the chance of a cut-off point being anywhere between 6 and 19 is  $1/14$  (if we only count the whole numbers). However, the cut-off point is not a single point. It is a range from the cut-off point to the end. Here's an analogy. You must imagine a number between 1 and 10. You win if you imagine a number that is lower than the number that I choose. Which number would you choose? It is safest to bet on the lowest number which is 1.<sup>110</sup> Likewise, an epistemicist moral agent would always want to choose to make the safest, the most conservative decision to avoid doing something morally wrong.

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<sup>110</sup> Thanks to Mark Bowker for this analogy.

Some might argue that it is a bad cost of accepting epistemicism. Here are some examples of epistemicist moral agents who demonstrate questionable moral conservatism.

ABORTION: Assume that getting an abortion is definitely permissible at 20-weeks of pregnancy and not permissible at 24-weeks of pregnancy. Given that abortion could be impermissible at any time between 20-weeks and 24-weeks, Abi decides to not get an abortion at 21-weeks of pregnancy even though she wants to.

EUTHANASIA: Assume that performing euthanasia is definitely permissible to the terminal cancer patients who are expected to live less than one month and not permissible to the patients who are expected to live for more than three months. Given that a patient is expected to live two months, the doctor decides to not perform euthanasia even though the patient wants her to perform euthanasia.

WINE SHARING: Assume that drinking one glass of wine from a shared bottle of wine is definitely permissible and drinking the whole bottle all by oneself is not permissible. When offered a second glass of wine, Waldo rejects the offer.

These decisions are questionable because the most conservative moral choices appear to conflict with one's prudential benefit. In the ABORTION case, the rest of Abi's life might be less well-off than life without her child. In the EUTHANASIA case, the patient might be suffering unnecessarily for another month. In the WINE SHARING case, Waldo might be seen as bad-mannered. If so, these decisions do not seem to be morally praiseworthy.

In response to this point, I say that making a conservative moral decision is still a decision. In these soritical cases, I have shown that unknown moral facts do not fail to be action-guiding. One can say that it is the limit of making an epistemicism-inspired moral decision that such decisions might not be prudentially good. I believe that it is a small bullet to bite. If one is an epistemicist moral realist, she would think that making a conservative moral decision is still better than risking doing something that is morally wrong. Avoiding doing what is morally wrong is still better than taking chances. As long as unknown moral facts guide our action and morally wrong decisions are not made, this is only a small cost to pay.

To recap, in chapter 4, I suggested the ways that moral realists can explain indeterminacy without violating any of the tenets of moral realism. First, I argued that moral realists can use the multi-range theory of vagueness to explain why moral terms are semantically indeterminate. Second, I argued that Barnes' model of metaphysical indeterminacy is better at explaining metaphysical indeterminacy than Shafer-Landau's model. Lastly, I argued that moral agents can make moral decisions under epistemicism because unknown moral facts can be action-guiding. In chapter 5, I conclude the thesis by showing that moral realists have better explanatory power than anti-realists in the moral disagreement debate. It is because moral realists are now able to explain different types of disagreement with three types of indeterminacy whereas anti-realists can only appeal to semantic indeterminacy.

## **5. Conclusion**

In order to argue that moral realism is compatible with moral indeterminacy, I have achieved the following. In chapter 2, I gave a definition of moral realism by suggesting the basic tenets of moral realism. In chapter 3, I showed that there are some conflicts between moral realism and semantic indeterminacy, metaphysical indeterminacy, and epistemic indeterminacy. Finally, in chapter 4, I have argued that moral realists can resolve these conflicts. Moral realists can explain moral indeterminacy without violating any of the tenets of moral realism and even endorse all three types of indeterminacy. Therefore, I concluded that moral realism is compatible with indeterminacy.

Following the conclusion above, I have two points to make in this last chapter. First, in contrast to how some philosophers argue that all moral indeterminacy can be, in fact, reduced to one kind of indeterminacy (for instance, reduced to metaphysical indeterminacy (Schoenfield 2015) or epistemicism (Williamson 1994)), I will argue that every kind of indeterminacy will have its own place. When every kind of indeterminacy has its own place, moral realists can appeal to each type of

indeterminacy to explain not only faultless moral disagreement but also resolvable or irresolvable moral disagreement.

Second, because indeterminacy works as a more useful tool to realists than anti-realists according to my arguments above, I argue that moral realism would have more explanatory power than anti-realism. This second point contributes to the debates between anti-realism and realism in meta-ethics in such a way that realists are now able to explain moral indeterminacy with metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic explanations whereas anti-realists cannot, giving more explanatory power to moral realism.

### **5.1 Moral Disagreement and Indeterminacy**

In this section, I will show how moral realists can appeal to each type of indeterminacy to explain different types of moral disagreement: faultless disagreement, irresolvable disagreement, and resolvable disagreement. I argue that semantic indeterminacy is helpful to explain faultless moral disagreements; metaphysical indeterminacy is helpful to explain genuine moral disagreements which are irresolvable; epistemicism is helpful to explain moral disagreements that might be resolvable in the future.

#### *5.1.1 Semantic Indeterminacy, Arbitrariness, and Faultless Disagreement*

It has been a difficult problem for moral realists to explain moral disagreement, especially faultless disagreement. Faultless disagreement is such that:

A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker *A*, a thinker *B*, and a proposition (content of judgment) *p*, such that (a) *A* believes (judges) that *p* and *B* believes (judges) that not-*p*. (b) Neither *A* nor *B* has made a mistake (is at fault) (Kölbel 2004: 53-54).

Moral realists would commonly want to argue that faultless disagreement is impossible because, in every moral dispute, either *p* or not-*p* must be true. We might

disagree now whether  $p$  or not- $p$  because we have not discovered enough objective moral facts to settle the disagreement. Those disagreements we have now are not faultless. Once all the relevant moral facts are discovered, there will be convergence.

However, there might be some advantages for moral realists to say that faultless moral disagreement is possible because, first, saying that there is no faultless moral disagreement is unintuitive. As Hills (2013: 415) points out, “faultless disagreement in ethics is a phenomenon that many people think is not just possible, but actual (...) this is one of the main reasons why many people think that some form of moral relativism must be correct.” If moral realists successfully explain how faultless disagreement is possible without endorsing any moral relativism, moral realists would be able to provide a strong counterargument against moral objectivism.

In this section, I show that moral realists can appeal to semantic indeterminacy to explain how faultless moral disagreement is possible. Sometimes, moral disagreements turn out to be faultless because our language is, by nature, indeterminate. Moral realists can appeal to semantic indeterminacy to explain faultless moral disagreement by appealing to arbitrary, yet faultless stopping points occurring in sorites series.

First, let’s bring back the sorites example from chapter 1 and the V-index from chapter 4 to explain arbitrary stopping points. Assume that it is permissible to pick up a five-pound note off the ground is permissible, but twenty-pound note off the ground is not. We can construct a sorites series, which ends up in a paradox, from this example.

To recap from chapter 3, a sorites series is comprised of formal induction steps which end up in a paradox.<sup>111</sup> Sorites series is paradoxical because the conclusion is false while all the premises are true (or vice versa). The Standard Sorites looks like below:

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<sup>111</sup> Of course, defining the sorites series with formal induction steps is not the only way to formulate Sorites series. See Hyde (2008: 10-15) for formulating different Sorites series.

$Fa_1$	$\Delta$ True
$Fa_1 > Fa_2$	?
$Fa_2 > Fa_3$	?
...	...
$Fa_{k-1} > Fa_k$	?
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$\therefore Fa_k$ (for any number $k$ )	$\Delta$ False

‘ $\Delta$ ’ stands for ‘definitely’; ‘F’ represents a soritical predicate such as ‘permissible’; ‘>’ represents the connective modus ponens, “if ... then ...”; the series,  $\langle a_1, \dots, a_k \rangle$ , represents the sequence of subjects, e.g.  $\langle \text{five-pounds, 6-pounds} \dots, k \text{ pounds} \rangle$  (Hyde 2008: 10). An argument is soritical when (1) the first argument in the series is definitely true (e.g. picking up a five-pound note is permissible); (2) the last argument is definitely false (e.g. picking up a twenty-pound note is permissible); (3) in between, there are arguments that fail to be definitely true or definitely false (e.g. picking up a ten-pound note is permissible). These arguments between the first and the last argument are the arguments that we are interested in because this is where faultless disagreement occurs, as semantic indeterminacy appears here.

Imagine two people arguing whether picking up a ten-pounds note off the ground is permissible, or eleven-pounds is permissible. We can say that these two people are having a faultless disagreement. How so? It is because the difference is sufficiently small that applying the term, ‘permissible’, to ten-pounds but not to eleven-pounds is arbitrary. This is to follow Raffman (2014)’s strategy: “the increments between adjacent items in a sorites series are sufficiently small as to make any differential application of the predicate as between them, that is, any application of ‘ $\Phi$ ’ to one but not to the other, *arbitrary*” (123). For example, if it is permissible to pick up ten-pounds off the ground, then it is arbitrary to say that picking up eleven-pounds off the ground is permissible. If it is permissible to pick up eleven-pounds off the ground, then it is arbitrary to say picking up twelve-pounds off the ground permissible.

Moreover, it is also permissible for one person to stop in the middle of the sorites series while the other does not. For example, in the series of picking up five-pounds note (permissible) to twenty-pounds note (not permissible), a moral agent may permissibly stop picking up unattended notes off the ground at 12 pounds or 13 pounds. A particular, single stopping place is not required; multiple stopping points are permissible, too, and these are all faultless stopping points.

Stopping at arbitrary points or having multiple stopping points is faultless because it is not completely random, irrational, unintelligible, or response-dependent (Raffman 2014: 169). The judgment of the competent language users does not solely determine whether a predicate, ‘permissible’, correctly refers to an object. Rather, as we have seen in §4.1, the V-index determines the referent. In sum, faultless disagreement occurs only when there the difference is sufficiently small that applying a vague moral term to one but not the other is arbitrary.

### *5.1.2 Epistemicism, Open-Texture, and Resolvable Disagreement*

Not like faultless disagreements, some moral disagreements can be resolved. Although they might not be resolvable right now, they might get resolved in the future. Why is it difficult to define moral concepts and laws strictly? It is because, according to Hart (1961), we are ignorant of all the relevant circumstances to know how moral terms refer:

The first handicap is our relative ignorance of fact; the second is our relative indeterminacy of aim. If the world in which we live were characterized only by a finite number of features, and these together with all the modes in which they could combine were known to us, then provision could be made in advance for every possibility (125).

The world is, unfortunately, characterized by an uncountable number of features, nor all the combination of these features are known to us now.

In this section, I explain what open-texture is and how some moral disagreements are affected by open-texture. When a term is open-texture, no matter



how precisely we define the term, there are always possible conditions which we have not taken into account to know whether the term applies or not (Waismann 1945: 123). To give an ordinary example, the term ‘meat’ is open-texture. Even though ‘meat’ is now broadly defined as the flesh of an animal, in near future there will be situations where it is indeterminate to decide whether ‘meat’ applies to the cultured meat grown from vitro animals cell culture, due to technological advancements.

Waismann shows that common words, such as ‘man’, ‘gold’, and ‘cat’, can also be open-texture: “Suppose I come across as being that looks like a man, speaks like a man, and is only one span tall – shall I say it is a man?” (1945: 120). When a term is open-texture, there are cases that the term is definitely applied, cases that the term is definitely not applied, and cases that it is questionable whether that term is applied or not. When two people disagree on these questionable cases, their dispute is about whether or not the meaning of the term justifies the application of the term.

Some moral terms are also open-texture. It is difficult to pinpoint the necessary and sufficient conditions for their correct application (Brennan 1977: 104). For example, ‘abortion’, ‘euthanasia’, ‘capital punishment’, and ‘murder’ are open-texture. Consider a case provided by Brennan (1977: 121). Suppose that a police officer and a criminal are in conversation:

- P: You were wrong to murder that bank clerk.  
C: What was wrong about it?  
P: You killed him and killing is wrong.  
C: How about you? You shot Pete Jones.  
P: But that was in self-defence.  
C: All right. But what about Sam Smith? They hanged him when he was defenceless and offered no threat to them.  
P: But he was a convicted murderer.

In this conversation, the police officer applies the term ‘murder’ to the criminal’s action (killing the bank clerk), but not to her own action (killing Pete Jones in self-defence). The police officer keeps identifying the relevant cases to which she thinks the term ‘murder’ applies, but such a process cannot be completed. Certainly, the

police officer can say that ‘murder’ means ‘unjustifiable homicide’, but it will be no help in figuring out which homicide cases are definitely murder.<sup>112</sup>

As this example shows, when a moral term is open-texture, it is indeterminate whether the term definitely refers to its reference. It is because it is impossible to know all the relevant considerations. Open-texture is different from context-sensitivity, soriticality, and vagueness in a way that the correct application of the term *will be determined* once all the relevant information is discovered.<sup>113</sup>

Open-texture does not allow arbitrariness, not like semantic indeterminacy (as we have seen in §5.1.1), context-sensitivity, soriticality, or vagueness (Raffman 2014: 125). Natural terms, such as ‘strawberry’ and ‘dog’, are open-texture in a way that the classification of such terms might vary but not arbitrarily. Let’s assume that some biologists discovered an animal located between dog and wolf in the chain of evolution. If they disagree whether this animal is a dog or a wolf, that is a genuine disagreement because there is a fact of the matter whether this animal is a dog or a wolf. All the relevant information is not discovered yet for us to classify it as a dog or a wolf, yet. The application of an open-texture term will be determinate at some point in the future because the interlocutors “would have reasons for changing their classifications and would take themselves to be correcting their previous judgments” (ibid.). Therefore, the terms that are open-texture inevitably cause disagreement. Some of the moral disagreement will be resolved when the relevant facts are revealed in the future. Some moral facts are determinate; we are just unaware of them for now.

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<sup>112</sup> Hart (1961) points out that the moral concepts, which are explicated in the form of rules of conduct, are also open-texture because not only are the words that make up the rules open texture, but also it is impossible to foresee every possible combination of circumstances in framing these rules. Brennan (1977) adds that it is impossible to completely explicate the moral concepts in terms of these rules of conduct.

<sup>113</sup> However, Shapiro (2013: 310) equates open-texture with context-sensitivity. He defines open-texture as “at least some conversational situations, a speaker is free to assert  $P_a$  and free to assert  $\neg P_a$ , without offending against the meanings of the terms, against any other rule of language use, and against the non-linguistic facts. Unsettled entails open.” I think open-texture and context-sensitivity are different in a way that open-texture doesn’t rely on judgments of speakers only whereas context-sensitivity does.

<sup>114</sup> This is Enoch (2011: 78)’s position.

### 5.1.3 *Metaphysical Indeterminacy and Genuine Disagreement*

Despite there being faultless disagreements and resolvable disagreements, some disagreements might not be resolvable at all, even though it is clear that one party is absolutely at fault. As Shafer-Landau (1994) points out, some moral disagreements might even persist among ideally rational, fully informed moral agents who share the same meaning and use the same word.

I call such a disagreement ‘genuine’ when the speakers, who use the same word to mean the same thing, cannot reach an agreement with each other. A well-known example of a genuine disagreement is from Hare (1952: 148). Let’s assume that a missionary and a cannibal use the word ‘good’ with the same meaning in mind: the most general adjective of commendation. The following is where the missionary and the cannibal disagree: the cannibal applies the word ‘good’ to bold and burly people who collect scalps by killing people more than the average, whereas the missionary applies the word ‘good’ to meek and gentle people who do not collect large quantities of scalps. The cannibal and the missionary communicate with each other with no misunderstanding. It is just that the application of the word ‘good’ differs from one another.

If the example above is not resolvable at all, it is because it is indeterminate which world, out of the two worlds that represent ‘good’ in different ways, is the actualized world, as Barnes’s model of metaphysical indeterminacy shows. Both worlds, which are described by the missionary and the cannibal, are *actual* worlds. However, it is indeterminate which of these worlds is the *actualized* world – the abstract world that represents things as being as they are. If this is the case, then genuine disagreements are possible. It is the case that one party is definitely at fault, but it is metaphysically indeterminate to point out which party is at fault.

In sum, some moral disagreements originate from semantic indeterminacy, therefore can be faultless. Some of the moral disagreement will be resolved because there are determinate moral facts. We are just unaware of them due to our epistemic

limitations; they are to be discovered in the future. Some moral disagreements might not be resolvable at all because they originate from metaphysical indeterminacy.

## **5.2 Indeterminacy Providing More Explanatory Power to Moral Realists**

Throughout the history of metaethics, many anti-realists, such as Mackie (1977: 36), Gibbard (1990: ch. 1), and Blackburn (1984: 168), have taken the prevalence and persistence of moral disagreement to be a powerful argument for defending their view. Anti-realists have been comfortably accepting the fact that moral disagreement is prevalent. Failure of convergence is inevitable in ethics because it is usually indeterminate to decide who is or which moral theory is objectively right.

It has been usually the case that anti-realists explain moral disagreement by appealing to indeterminate or vague moral propositions. For example, Stephen Schiffer (2005) argues that even though there are truth-evaluable moral propositions, not one of them can be determinately true. He holds that moral concepts supervene on non-normative concepts such as conative facts. Since the conative facts are considerably vague, “the concept of having a certain moral concept, such as the concept of moral wrongness, is extremely vague” (258). Since vague moral propositions are neither determinately true nor determinately false, it is always possible for two people to disagree about the truth-value of any moral proposition.

It has been easier for anti-realists than for realists to appeal to indeterminacy to explain prevalent moral disagreement. It is because anti-realists can simply say that indeterminacy arises from the differences in our values, opinions, or social norms. They can appeal to the differences in cultures to explain why moral disagreement is prevalent. Since it is indeterminate whether one culture is right or wrong, moral disagreement inevitably arises between these cultures. Such an explanation of moral disagreement appears more intuitive than appealing to objective moral facts.

Therefore, the goal of my dissertation was to provide a way for moral realists to explain indeterminacy as well without any inconsistency or incompatibility. I have first defined moral realism (§2) and explained that there are three kinds of indeterminacy (§3) – semantic, metaphysical, and epistemic. I then argued that not only is moral realism compatible with all three kinds of indeterminacy (§4), but also moral realists can explain different types of moral disagreement – faultless, resolvable, and genuine – with different types of indeterminacy (§5.1).

The upshot of my research is that moral realists have now gained explanatory power towards moral disagreement. They can now explain different types of moral disagreement through metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic indeterminacy without denying any tenets of moral realism. Moral realists can still uphold their tenet on moral objectivity, which is one of the appealing features of moral realism while embracing indeterminacy. If the strength of a theory is measured by how much explanation it can provide, my dissertation has shown that moral realism wins over anti-realism in this regard.

Would all moral realists welcome my conclusion? No. Enoch (2009), as a robust moral realist, would reject my conclusion. Enoch thinks that indeterminacy can play some role in accounting for moral disagreement, but it should not play the key role in explaining disagreement. Enoch has two worries on this topic. The first worry is that if there is genuine indeterminacy, Enoch thinks that both parties are at fault, rather than only one. When two parties genuinely disagree on a moral matter, both parties must be at fault. Enoch thinks that this is not explanatory progress because it is parsimonious to say that one party is at fault rather than two. I think Enoch's first worry is misguided. As I have explained in §5.1.3, if there is genuine disagreement, then one of the parties is at fault when they disagree. It is just indeterminate to decide which party is at fault.

Enoch's second worry is about the prevalence of moral indeterminacy. If we pinpoint indeterminacy as the cause of moral disagreement, he thinks that most cases of moral controversies would turn out to be indeterminate. Given that moral

disagreement is massively prevalent, there may not be many determinate moral truths. Enoch thinks that this is not a victory for moral realists.

Against Enoch's worry that if we explain moral disagreement with indeterminacy there would be too much indeterminacy, I answer Enoch's worry is misguided. It is because moral realists can now distinguish different types of moral disagreement with different types of indeterminacy. Sometimes, having too much indeterminacy might not be problematic because some disagreements, which originate from semantic indeterminacy, might be faultless. Conversely, there could not be much indeterminacy after all since some moral disagreements originate from our epistemic limitations. The moral truth could be discovered in near future. Not all moral disagreement is genuine, therefore there is no need to worry about prevalent metaphysical indeterminacy.

In conclusion, intuitively, we do not want to say that all morality is relative to our opinions or culture. There are objective moral facts: slavery is wrong; women are not inferior to men. At the same time, we also want to accept the fact that there is indeterminacy in our world: moral disagreements are prevalent and differences in our opinions and culture are persistent. Only by taking moral indeterminacy seriously, we can achieve harmony between indeterminacy and morality. My dissertation aimed to show that moral realism is better at preserving harmony between indeterminacy and morality than anti-realists do.

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